





THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES

.





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation





"The driver stopped for a few minutes and pulled down the front cap of the cart ; then proceeding, he urged the horses on by shout and whip " (see p. 6).

[*Frontispiece.*

# AT MOSETI'S BIDDING

*A TALE OF THE GCALEKA WAR*

BY

TELKIN KERR

*ILLUSTRATED BY G. W. PILKINGTON*

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR BY  
HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LD.

52, LONG ACRE, LONDON, W.C.



PR  
6021  
K466 m

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK  
TO  
TWO GOOD AND TRUE WOMEN  
MY WIFE AND MY SISTER  
WITHOUT THEIR INVALUABLE AID AND ENCOURAGING  
SYMPATHY IT WOULD NEVER HAVE REACHED  
THE PRINTER'S HANDS

Whatever good there may be in these pages  
is theirs, and the faults and shortcomings  
—and their name is legion—are mine

1216751



## P R E F A C E

---

I MAKE no apology for having had the temerity to write and place this book before the public. The effort may be a feeble one—no doubt it will be considered such by numbers of those who think it worthy of criticism; but for their fierce onslaughts I care nothing, since my object is neither fame nor gain. I have but one object in view, and that is to put into the hands of boys—and, indeed, also into the hands of their seniors—something of adventure, so dear to the hearts of men, whether they be old or young, and yet free from all impure suggestions. If those who read find pleasure in these pages, then my object is achieved, for pure pleasure is good for the body, good for the mind, and necessarily good for the soul, and the logical deduction which I shall be justified in making, if the book has given some pleasure, is, that I have done some good, and that is my object. If, however, the reader finds no pleasure in what I have written, then I have, at least, the satisfaction of knowing that I have done no harm, for I have studiously endeavoured to avoid anything that is base or in any way tainted with things,

words, or suggestions which are not in keeping with that which is right and good.

I have more patience with the writer who calls a spade by its proper name, and who, while telling his or her story of vice, takes care to lay the blame on the shoulders of the rightful character, than I have with the writer who paints in ink a character whom one must admire, then makes this selfsame character do no end of wrong things, and yet tells the story in so plausible a manner as to make the reader palliate the faults, exonerate the sin, and clothe the person who has done wrong with a still thicker cloak of admiration. The sinner is put on a pedestal, and, no matter how often he falls, the reader picks him up, replaces him on his position of honour, and continues the hero-worshipping until the *finis* is reached.

These are the books which do the harm ; these are the snares and dangers which beset the unwary reader, and which frequently have results so disastrous and far-reaching that, did the writer but know it, he would, if he possessed the smallest spark of manhood, throw down his pen and cease his damnatory scribblings.

But enough of this. It is for you, my reader, to judge my work, but, whatever your judgment may be, pray believe me when I say that my intention was good, even though the execution may have proved hopelessly feeble.

THE AUTHOR.

SEA POINT, CAPE COLONY,  
*December, 1904.*

# CONTENTS

---

## CHAPTER I

|                       | PAGE |
|-----------------------|------|
| ON THE ROAD . . . . . | I    |

## CHAPTER II

|                                         |   |
|-----------------------------------------|---|
| THE THUNDERSTORM ON THE VELDT . . . . . | 6 |
|-----------------------------------------|---|

## CHAPTER III

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| ON THE BANKS OF THE MKLUTI . . . . . | 10 |
|--------------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER IV

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| THE END OF THE JOURNEY . . . . . | 15 |
|----------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER V

|                           |    |
|---------------------------|----|
| TROUBLE BREWING . . . . . | 19 |
|---------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER VI

|                                              |    |
|----------------------------------------------|----|
| THE NIGHT ALARM—TOSI TO THE RESCUE . . . . . | 25 |
|----------------------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER VII

|                          | PAGE |
|--------------------------|------|
| MORE FUGITIVES . . . . . | 30   |

## CHAPTER VIII

|                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------|----|
| THE SILVER LINING OF THE CLOUD . . . . . | 36 |
|------------------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER IX

|                                                |    |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT—A DASH FOR SAFETY. | 41 |
|------------------------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER X

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| IN ITSObI . . . . . | 49 |
|---------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XI

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| CAPTURED . . . . . | 55 |
|--------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XII

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| TOSI AGAIN . . . . . | 61 |
|----------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XIII

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| A STRANGE AWAKENING . . . . . | 66 |
|-------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XIV

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| THE ABDUCTION . . . . . | 71 |
|-------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XV

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| MOSETI'S MOUNTAIN KRAAL . . . . . | 75 |
|-----------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XVI

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| MOSETI'S BIDDING . . . . . | PAGE<br>84 |
|----------------------------|------------|

## CHAPTER XVII

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| THE HILL OF DEATH—SALMO . . . . . | 90 |
|-----------------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XVIII

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| SALMO'S CAVE . . . . . | 98 |
|------------------------|----|

## CHAPTER XIX

|                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| THROUGH THE SECRET PASSAGE . . . . . | 103 |
|--------------------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XX

|                                                                     |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| DOROTHY AND KAKANI—A PRESENTIMENT—SALMO AND<br>THE SENTRY . . . . . | 111 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXI

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| IN MOSETI'S KRAAL . . . . . | 118 |
|-----------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXII

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| SPIRITS OR MFENE? . . . . . | 124 |
|-----------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXIII

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| WHEN THE FULL MOON ROSE . . . . . | 131 |
|-----------------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXIV

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| THE FOUR WHO RETURNED . . . . . | 139 |
|---------------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXV

|                             | PAGE |
|-----------------------------|------|
| THE LAST OF SALMO . . . . . | 144  |

## CHAPTER XXVI

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| RECAPTURE . . . . . | 148 |
|---------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXVII

|                                                                         |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| ON THE VERGE OF DEATH—A NARROW ESCAPE—DARK-<br>NESS AND LIGHT . . . . . | 154 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|

## CHAPTER XXVIII

|                                             |     |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|
| CLOSING SCENES—FAREWELL TO ITSObI . . . . . | 158 |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|

# AT MOSETI'S BIDDING

---

## CHAPTER I

### ON THE ROAD

HUTS here, huts there, huts near, huts so far away that in the distance you are almost inclined to mistake them for ant-hills, only you know they are huts. The whole country seems studded with huts, some large, others small. Will they never cease? No. The cart jolts on along the road, and still there seems to be no end to the huts. Sometimes in clusters, sometimes scattered. But this is Kafirland, and the heart of Kafirland, too; so you don't expect to see palaces, do you? And even were it not Kafirland, you would not like to see the rural simplicity spoiled by the inartistic hand of civilised man. The country is at its worst at present, for it is winter, and the rains fall chiefly in summer, so that what is in summer a rich grassy expanse with numerous undulations, is now a parched and barren waste, guiltless of a single blade of grass or greenery of any sort, save along the river banks, where the mimosa bushes thrive all the year round, or about the mission and trading stations.

The cart which we noticed just now contains only one occupant besides the driver, a christianised native; christianised, because he has discarded the red ochre

and blanket of the raw native, and has donned the throwaways of some benevolent missionary or trader.

The horses are not such as one would expect to see in Rotten Row; they are, on the other hand, two very mean-looking animals, but they are nevertheless capable of doing work such as would speedily kill their handsome brethren which so nobly carry the aristocracy of England along the Row named "Rotten."

Harold Morton, the passenger, was a young man from the Colony, who, being anxious to see something of life in other spheres, and having a little cash wherewith to gratify his wish, had thrown up a good appointment in Cape Town in order to join an old school chum in a Kafir trading-station, and now we see him jogging along in the cart on the way to Engwenza, his friend's station.

His journey had been a long and rather a dreary one, for despite the fact that the scenes through which he was passing were new to him, he was absolutely without that *sine qua non* to comfort, companionship, for his driver could speak very little English whereas he could not speak a word of Kafir. The little information which he was able to elicit was gained by much gesture on his part, which did not always bring a comprehensible reply; therefore, for the most part, there was silence, and only when silence became unbearable did he attempt anything like a question.

"I say, Old Stick-in-the-mud, are we far from Engwenza now?"

"I-kona," replied the driver, looking somewhat perplexed. Then, after a moment's pause, when he realised that the badly pronounced Engwenza was meant for their destination, he asked, "Engwenza?"

"Yes, you old duffer, Engwenza," and this time Morton made a better hit at the pronunciation. "Engwenza," he again repeated. "How far?"

"Auw! Engwenza, so," replied the old fellow, as the light dawned on him and he held up four fingers

to indicate that four more hours in the bumping cart must pass before they would reach the station.

"Hang it all," Morton said, half to himself, half aloud. "It is five o'clock now, and if he says four more hours, it means another seven, if, indeed, we are there then; these chaps have no idea of distance or time."

But the old boy had lapsed again into the reverie which always possessed him when not spoken to or speaking, and Morton buried himself again in the pages of "Martin Chuzzlewit," though his eyes already felt sore with reading in the jolting vehicle.

Half an hour later they stopped to outspan, so that the horses might have a roll and a bit of a feed; and while they are doing this, and old Roro is busy mending the harness—a work which, by the way, he seemed to be always engaged upon when halting—let us take a brief look at Harold Morton, as he strolls about loosening his cramped limbs. Tall, straight as the proverbial arrow, and of a decidedly athletic build, he seems an ideal wing three-quarter in rugby, and one can in imagination almost see him in flannels on the cricket-field driving the ball to the boundary with the ease of a first-rate batsman, or slashing into his opponent's court at tennis with the dexterity of one to the manner born. His face is the face of a man who, while enjoying all the healthy pursuits and pleasures of life, has given a wide berth to its evils. Open, manly, with eyes which bespeak the man of honest purpose, and by their size and dark brown colour tempt one who looks on them for the first time to look again, and ever after to find pleasure in them. His mouth is well cut, and while his rather tightly closed lips show decision, there is that unmistakable look in them which speaks of gentleness. On the whole, it is a singularly handsome face, bronzed by the sun in many a match of cricket or other sport.

One wonders why such an one, whose every movement proclaims him to be a man of the world, susceptible

to all its attractions, undoubtedly a favourite with the ladies, should seek to hide himself in Kafirland.

Well, let me tell you a secret. The truth is, Harold Morton was badly in love, or thought he was, with a pretty little lady whom he had met at a dance near Cape Town; but she did not return his affections and became engaged to another, so our friend thought to kill two birds with one stone by coming to Kafirland—viz.: to escape from the scenes of his unsuccessful suit, and also, what was after all his chief reason, to see something of a different kind of life to that which he had been used to.

His friend, Ivor Risk, had lived in the Eastern Province, where his father, a descendant of the 1820 settlers, had a farm. He had been sent to Cape Town to be educated, and there he had met Harold Morton, and the two became great friends. After leaving college Risk had returned to the Eastern Province, and was just about to begin practice as an attorney in one of the largest towns there, when his health gave way, and he was advised to give up all idea of office work for a time; so he hit upon the idea of taking to Kafir trading for a year or two, more for the sake of adventure than for what he would make out of it, for his parents were well-to-do. His father not only raised no objection to the scheme, but volunteered the wherewithal to carry it into effect. So before very long an owner of a small place was found who was willing to dispose of his business, and Risk was installed in it.

His knowledge of the language stood him in good stead, and being a friendly sort of fellow he was soon very popular with the natives. His health improved wonderfully, and after six months' stay he had taken so much to the life that he decided to remain for a few years. But one thing tried him very much, and that was the lack of companionship. He did not desire to see Kafirland peopled with whites from end to end, but he did often wish for some one to speak to in his own language.

Often one of the neighbouring traders would ride over on business and would stay the night, but when such an one again left Risk would feel more miserable than before ; so, when he received a letter from his old friend Morton, telling him of his misfortune and his desire to get away from where he was, he did not lose a moment in writing to ask him to spend as long a time as he liked with him. In his letter he half jokingly asked if Morton would not like to join him in his business as a partner, and was surprised and much pleased when, by the return of post, he received a letter from him accepting the offer and stating that he would leave within a month's time. The preliminaries were soon settled, and now Ivor Risk was waiting, with what patience he could command, the arrival of his friend and partner, for whom he had sent his cart to the nearest railway station some days before.

## CHAPTER II

### THE THUNDERSTORM ON THE VELDT

THE cart is again on the way to Engwenza after the brief halt where we last left it. It is driving between some low-lying hills, and for a time no huts are in sight, though now and again, as it rounds a corner, it passes a solitary clump of huts standing near the road. The little streams, which are every now and then crossed, trickle feebly along the middle of the otherwise dry beds. The sun has just set, and in the fading light there is a weird look about the veldt. Now the sound of a Kafir dog barking is heard ; then, after an interval of silence, the voices of Kafirs, speaking in some of the huts on the hills, are borne down on the still evening ; then again silence, save for the sound of the horses' hoofs on the hard road and the rumbling and jolting of the cart.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a low rumbling sound, and the old driver looked up, while an exclamation escaped him. Thunder it was, unmistakably, and as Morton looked back in the direction from whence the sound seemed to proceed, he was astonished to see that a thick black cloud had arisen, and even as he looked there was a tremendous flash of lightning, followed by a peal of thunder. The driver stopped for a few minutes and pulled down the front cap of the cart ; then proceeding, he urged the horses on by shout and whip. But the horses were tired, after the long day's journey, and gradually fell back into the old pace.

Meanwhile the thunder grew louder and louder with each peal, and the lightning flashed nearer and nearer, while the heavy black clouds closed in above, until, in what appeared to be a very few minutes, every star was blotted out from view and the rain began to fall in great drops. Then a blinding flash, an awful crash of thunder, which seemed as if the very earth were being torn asunder, and then the reservoirs of the heavens were opened and the rain poured down in torrents. Morton had often witnessed heavy downpours when in Cape Town; but nothing he had ever seen came up to this. The horses, already terror-stricken, pulled hard at the reins; but Roro knew his work, and kept them well in hand.

Down the rain still poured, and the flashes of lightning, which now became less frequent, were reflected all round in the water. The road was for a time a veritable stream, as was evident by the splashing made by the horses' feet and the rush of the water off the wheels. Then as suddenly as the rain commenced, so suddenly it stopped, and Morton congratulated himself that the storm was over; but scarcely had the thought passed through his mind when there came again the low far-away rumbling of distant thunder, gradually increasing in sound as it approached nearer and nearer; then a flash, and in less than ten minutes the storm was as bad as—nay, worse than—before.

Another blinding flash followed by a peculiar sound as of some heavy body passing through the air, with an awful sound, something akin to whistling; then a crash as the electric fluid buried itself in the earth not a hundred yards away, and then the most terrible crash of thunder, which seemed to the imagination as if all the cannonade of the earth had gone off, together with the bursting up of hell itself.

The horses, now thoroughly maddened, reared and plunged, while the cart rocked on its springs, threatening to go over every minute; then, with one supreme effort, the frightened animals took the bits between their teeth,

and despite the combined efforts of Morton and Roro to keep them in check, they dashed along madly, dragging the cart as it swayed from side to side. Every moment Harold thought they would be overturned, but the animals knew the road and kept it. A flash of lightning showed old Roro's face, blanched and terror-stricken, for he realised that he no longer was the controlling power, and he knew something else which Harold was ignorant of. But he was soon to be enlightened, for, above the noise of the falling torrents, he heard a sound like the sound of heavy waves on a rocky shore, only ten times louder. Nearer and nearer they came to the sound, until all other sounds were inaudible.

Suddenly the horses slackened their headlong pace, and then came to an abrupt standstill as if by mutual agreement. Roro quickly jumped off and rushed to their heads, and Harold followed him. Together they stood, each holding an animal by its bridle, while the rain continued to pour and the terrible roaring sound seemed right on them. The horses were quivering with terror, and it took the men all their time and strength to keep them quiet, for they now evinced a desire to turn, probably with the idea of rushing back in the direction from whence they had come, away from the terrible roaring.

Rain, rain, in buckets; nay, almost in reservoirs. Never in all his life had Harold felt so utterly dejected. He had had a terrible experience following upon a long and tedious journey, and now as he stood holding the horse he felt almost inclined to cry like a child. He was wet and hungry, with no prospect of getting to Engwenza that night, for he knew that the sound he heard was a river, now flooded by the rain, over which it was impossible to pass until it had subsided. For an hour the rain continued, then slowly it abated its violence, and in a short time after it had stopped completely.

"Wou!" ejaculated Roro at last, as he wrung the water off one sleeve and wiped the moisture from his

face with his arm. Then, without another word, he proceeded to unharness the horses. This done, they were hobbled and turned loose beside the road, and the two men, after tying the disselboom to a bush to prevent the cart from tipping, got in and made themselves as comfortable as possible. To light a fire was impossible, for everything had been so soaked by the rain that nothing would burn; so there was no help for it but to sit in the cart and take consolation from that sublime comforter, tobacco.

So they sat, Morton in his accustomed seat at the back of the cart, and Roro in front. In a very short time Roro was fast asleep, but Harold felt wet and uncomfortable, and sleep would not visit him for some hours; but even to him the divine consoler came at last.

## CHAPTER III

### ON THE BANKS OF THE MKLUTI

**I**VOR RISK had long closed his store for the day, and was now sitting in his hut awaiting the arrival of Morton. He was trying to interest himself in his book, but for once that never-failing source of pleasure failed him. Every now and again he would lay it down on the table face downwards, and go to the door of his hut and listen attentively for the sound of the overdue cart; but no sound could he hear, save the steady rush of the water as the rain poured down.

"It's impossible," he said—he had got accustomed to speaking his thoughts aloud—"for them to come on to-night, unless they crossed the Mkluti river before the storm came on." Saying this he sat down again; but any one observing him could easily have seen that he was far from being at ease.

"I do hope they outspanned on the other side of the river. Roro would surely never think of crossing to-night."

Again a pause. Then, suddenly, he sprang up. "Hang it! I can't sit still with this anxiety upon me. What if they have met with an accident! Struck by the lightning, or perhaps even washed down the Mkluti. They certainly would be, if they attempted crossing."

Then, looking at his watch, he exclaimed, "A quarter past ten!" and, walking to the door, he looked out.

The rain had ceased falling, but the water was still rushing madly over the ground.

"Well, I don't feel much inclined for the ride," he said, looking out into the dark night, and then longingly back into the plain but comfortable hut. "Still, I must satisfy myself as far as possible that all is well."

Going back, he put on a pair of thick boots and his overcoat, and taking down his saddle and bridle from the rack behind the door, he extinguished his candle and went out to saddle his horse.

Risk kept four horses for use on the station, but three of these were allowed to run at pleasure on the veldt, except when wanted. One animal he always kept in the stable, so that there might be no delay when he required a horse urgently. A long two hours' ride brought him to the banks of the Mkluti. It was past one o'clock, and the sky was dark as ink.

The river was full to its banks, and it roared along with a sound like incessant thunder. To shout would do no good, for what was the human voice compared with the roar of nature.

Strain his eyes as he would, he could not see the opposite bank, far less anything on it—not even the glimmer of a coal; but then the night had been so wet that he knew, that even if the cart were outspanned on the bank, there could not be a dry stick to light a fire with, nor a dry place to light it on, even if given the necessary fuel.

There was only one of two things for Risk to do. Either to return to Engwenza, or to spend the night where he was until daylight broke. Which was it to be?

After a few moments' consideration he decided that, having come so far for a purpose, he would not return until he had satisfied himself that the cart was or was not on the opposite bank; and as darkness prevented him from ascertaining that now,

he determined to wait for daylight. So, jumping off, he left his horse standing, while he searched about for a spot at least drier than the rest, where he might lie.

It was so fearfully dark that he had to move slowly, and feel before him with his hands to prevent being scratched by the mimosa thorns. After half-an-hour's search he came upon a little rising ground, and near the top were two large rocks, so placed as to have kept a small piece of ground just below them comparatively dry.

Then he walked back in the direction whence he had come, counting his paces so as to be able to find the place again. Having found his horse, he unsaddled it and returned to the rocks, where he contrived by means of his overcoat and saddle to make a tolerably comfortable bed, whereon he had scarcely lain before he fell asleep.

Long before the sun had shown itself Ivor awoke. His horse was standing a few yards away, lazily cropping the dry blades of grass. Rising, he walked through the bushes until he came to the riverside, and there, in the faint morning light, he discerned the cart standing close to the bank. The dark moving forms of the horses could, in the dim light, be seen a little higher up. The river was still flowing swiftly, but it had sunk considerably since the previous night, and past experience told him that in another few hours, unless the rain came on again, there would be little left of the raging torrent.

Gradually the sky brightened, and the first rays from the coming sun showed the details of the scene. In the cart Morton reclined, apparently fast asleep; while old Roro was moving about in that deliberate way peculiar to Kafirs, now tying the harness with a piece of riempje\* where it seemed weak, then looking at the wheels and the springs of the cart; occasionally

\* Riempje = a thin strip of leather.

casting his eyes in the direction of the horses, to see that they did not stray too far.

Putting his fingers to his lips, Risk gave a loud whistle, which carried distinctly above the now much subdued roar of the river, and immediately Roro looked up; then, seeing who it was, he raised his hand in salutation after the manner of the Kafir.

Risk watched him go to the cart and shake Morton, who sat up, looking for a moment bewildered; but as Roro pointed across to where Risk was standing, he jumped out and waved his hat.

A few words of greeting were shouted across, but the voices had to be raised very high, and it was trying; so, the first greetings said, or rather shouted, both were silent. After a while the idea occurred to Risk that he might be able to cross the river higher up, so he mounted his horse barebacked and rode along the bank to where he knew the stream was broader and shallower; and here, with some difficulty, he at length managed to cross, and, within a few minutes, he had joined his companion.

"Well, I am glad to see you, old fellow," he said, as they stood with hands tightly clasped. "I was very anxious about you when the storm came on so badly last night, and I feared that you *might* have attempted to cross the river, though I scarcely thought you would have done so foolish a thing."

Then, in a few words, Morton told him of their night's experiences; and, sitting down, the two talked on and on, about their schooldays, about their respective doings since they had last seen each other, about their future life, and in fact about everything. The time slipped round quickly, and when Roro brought them some coffee which he had managed to make, they were surprised to find that they had been talking for over an hour.

A few slices of coarse bread and some biltong,\*

\* Biltong=dried meat.

together with their coffee, made an excellent breakfast ; after which, the river having sunk considerably, they prepared to cross, and within a very short while were safely on the other side, and once more on the way to Engwenza.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE END OF THE JOURNEY

**I**T is necessary at this stage to take a brief glance round the trading station, Engwenza, so that the reader may the more readily understand subsequent events as they are related in these pages.

Two huts, rather more substantially built than those occupied by the Kafirs, and with properly appointed doors and windows, stand on a little eminence. These constitute Ivor Risk's home ; the one he uses as his bedroom, and the other, which stands a few yards away, is his kitchen, dining-room, and reception-room combined : but of these more anon.

About fifteen yards away from the huts stands a corrugated iron building, part of which is occupied as the store, while its extension is used as the stable and cart-house.

A couple of hundred yards from the huts is the river, which runs slowly and deeply between its high banks, upon which at intervals are three weeping willows, bending low toward the water.

Opposite the front of the living rooms or huts, and distant some three hundred yards, there is a long, low, flat-topped hill, half way up which stand four rather large huts surrounded by a low stone wall, wherein lives Nonga, a headman of not too good a character amongst the few whites in the district.

Between this hill and the huts runs the road from the railway station, by which Morton had come, and which

proceeds past Engwenza to the few small villages further in the country.

All around, the country is rather low-lying and somewhat undulating, while in the distance behind the station lies a long range of mountains, at the top of whose highest point there is a cluster of trees, which in the distance look like gigantic bushes.

On the left, far away, another range of mountains runs and loses itself far beyond the spur of the first mountain range, which stretches out as if to meet it. Then to the right the ground seems to rise in slow terraces until it forms the sky-line about four miles away.

This is the general outlook of the country for some miles around Engwenza, and as far as the eye can see, on every side, lie huts: sometimes three or four clusters lie close together; sometimes only a small group, of two or three huts, lies alone; while here and there stands a solitary hut.

Such was Risk's home, which Morton was now about to share with him. After so long a term of solitude, it is not to be wondered at that he welcomed the change which his friend's coming would bring. How often he had longed for the companionship of some one with whom to converse he alone knew, and, now that some one had come in the person of an old and valued friend, he was delighted beyond bounds.

True, he liked the life, with its freedom, varied with a little adventure, or he would not have stayed so long, for, as has previously been said, he was not dependent on trading for a means of livelihood; but he had latterly begun to find the lonely life very trying at times, and, but for Morton's coming, he would probably soon have relinquished it and sought something more congenial. Now his only objection was removed, and he looked forward with pleasurable anticipation to the life they would spend together.

Morton, on the other hand, knew nothing of the life he was about to commence, beyond what he had

gathered from his friend's letters ; but he was prepared for anything, and, as his nature was one of those happy ones which adapt themselves to anything and are easily satisfied, it was apparent to the most sceptical of his friends that he would get on well.

\* \* \* \* \*

We left the cart, after seeing it through the river, while we proceeded somewhat ahead to become acquainted with Engwenza and its environments.

Slowly jolting along the road now comes the cart, while Risk on horseback rides alongside conversing with Morton. Now the cart is down in a little hollow, now it comes in view again as it rises, and so on, until, coming to the top of a small eminence, the station lies before it.

Roro drew up to give the horses a last blow.

"Behold your home," said Risk.

"Where?" asked Morton, looking about until his eyes rested upon the iron building. "Not that iron place, is it?"

Risk's face fell ; he feared his friend was disappointed.

"No," he answered, "that's the store ; the huts constitute our home." Then, after a moment's pause, he added : "I fear you are disappointed, old chap."

"Not at all," said Morton, with a laugh, so hearty that Risk's fears were instantly dispelled. "Not at all," he repeated. "If I had thought for a moment, I would have known that this would be the sort of thing to expect. I should rather have been disappointed had I found a modern building with all the latest modern conveniences. I have come to see new life in a new place, and you have not disappointed me."

Risk was reassured by the reply, and as the cart proceeded over the last few hundred yards, he pointed out various things of interest on the place.

There was the site for their new cattle-kraal, there the plot of ground upon which he meant to plant mealies when the season arrived, and so on.

Morton drank in everything with a keen interest,

for was he not already a partner? Already he had a feeling of pride when he realised that he owned at least half of the place, the stock, and even of the cart and horses. A few minutes more and they drew up at the hut, and, having helped to unharness the horses, they went inside the sleeping hut while Roro made coffee for them.

## CHAPTER V

### TROUBLE BREWING

“WELL, Harold, now that you have passed five months here, I would like to know what you think of the country and the life generally.”

Ivor Risk and Morton were sitting comfortably in their cane easy chairs in the sleeping hut, having a last talk and pipe, as was their invariable custom before turning in to bed.

“Fine, old chap. I am awfully comfortable, and the free life suits me splendidly.”

“Well,” Ivor said reflectively, after a pause, during which he gazed vacantly at the smoke as it ascended to the roof, “as far as I am concerned, now that I have you with me, I’m game to stay on here for ever, were it not for two things. The first is this, we see little or nothing of the society of ladies, and that is a decided drawback; and secondly, there is no doubt but that the Kafirs are beginning to get restless, and unless I am much mistaken trouble is fast brewing amongst them. Not that I fear them in any way; but I know a war with them will spell ruin to the country.”

Morton laughed quietly as Risk delivered himself of this. “Bless you, man, what do you want to worry your head about girls for? For my part, I’ve had enough of them, and as for the Kafirs getting troublesome, well, I admit there is a good deal of dissatisfaction amongst them, but that will pass off by-and-by. However, you know them better than I do.”

“Well, I believe in facing the possibilities; in this

case I may say the probabilities," answered Risk; "and I feel sure that we *are* in for trouble with them. The natives will never allow themselves to be disarmed without a struggle. At any rate, I have been looking at our rifles as a precautionary measure, and I wrote last week to East London for a couple of good revolvers, so that if the worst comes to the worst we can at least protect ourselves—— Hullo! Listen! I hear a horse galloping along the road"; saying which, he rose, opened the door, and looked out into the beautifully clear moonlight night.

Morton rose too and came beside him.

The sounds of the galloping horse were still a long way off—perhaps a mile away, perhaps more; for on these still, calm nights, sound travels far.

Nearer came the sound until, within a few minutes, it appeared to be not more than two or three hundred yards away. Then a Kafir dog barked in a hut which was close to the road, and another replied farther off.

Presently above the rise appeared a dark figure, which on nearer approach could be seen to be a man on horseback.

"Rather late to go riding about," said Morton; then he added, as the horseman turned off the road and came towards the huts, "He's coming here; I do hope——" but here he stopped himself, for he saw in the light that his friend's face showed anxiety.

"Yes, I know what you were going to say," said Risk: "you were going to express the hope that it wasn't bad news for me. Oh, no!" he continued, "it's old Watler"; and immediately his face cleared as they stepped forward to meet the rider, who was now close upon them.

"Well, Mr. Watler, and why this nocturnal visit?" asked Ivor, as they shook hands.

"Good evening, Mr. Risk, and good evening to you, Mr. Morton," said the rider, as he dismounted. "Well, I scarcely thought to find you still awake, and was sorry to think I should have to disturb your slumbers

by bringing you bad news. Fact is, we are going to have trouble with the natives."

"Oh!" said both boys.

"Thought so," said Risk; then he added, "We were just speaking of it when we heard your horse coming along; but what has occurred fresh to hasten matters?"

"Well, there is nothing fresh, only that the natives held a big meeting a few nights ago at Eatobi and decided that they would not allow themselves to be disarmed; and that means war, for the Government will not now go back, and the natives know it. Last night they broke into several stores between this and Umloolo, and stole everything they could carry away in the shape of rifles, clothing, and food. Then this morning I heard that the chiefs had ordered all the native crops to be cut, and that is always a sure sign of war. Knowing that you might be unprepared, I rode off as soon as it grew dark to-night, and now I must be off again, for there is no one at my place beyond my wife and daughters, and, though I don't exactly fear for their safety, still it is best to be on the safe side."

After this, they could hardly invite Watler to stay for the night; but his horse was tired, so they persuaded him to allow them to lend him one of their horses and to leave his in its place until theirs could again be brought back.

"Well, good-night," said Watler, as he sprang into his saddle.

"Good-night, Mr. Watler, and thanks very much," said Risk; while Morton also expressed his thanks.

Then off the horse went, while Risk and Morton stood watching it as it gradually disappeared from view.

"It is as I expected," observed Risk as they turned to go inside. "Hullo!"

This last was occasioned by a sight which, for the moment, startled Risk, and in turn his companion, as his eyes also fell upon it.

There, in the shadows of the hut, next to the door, stood a native fully armed with assegai and skin shield. Straight and silent he stood for a few moments, after he knew that he was observed ; then he raised his hand and said, in a low though deep voice, "H—s—h ! Musa ukuwenza nxolo."\*

"Oh, it is Tosi," murmured Risk, softly. "Come, let us, in obedience to his injunction, get inside." Then he motioned to the Kafir to enter, and he and Morton followed.

"Vala icango,"† said Tosi, as he squatted down on the ground ; and Risk, having closed the door as requested, sat down in his chair next to Morton.

There was silence for a while, as neither Morton nor Risk felt disposed to evince curiosity as to the object of the visit ; and Tosi, having lighted his long pipe, was pulling vigorously at it, as if that was the only matter which was of any moment.

Presently, he looked up, and first fixed his gaze on Risk and then on Morton ; then he spoke, and his voice was hushed as if he feared some intruder was listening. He spoke in Kafir, and Morton had difficulty in understanding all that he said, as he did not know the language thoroughly, though he had made astonishing progress in it during the short time he had been in the country. However, what he did not understand was explained to him afterwards by Risk.

"When the clouds hang low, and are heavy with water, men bring their cattle into the kraals, lest they perish, swept away by the rush of many waters. When the vultures soar in the sky, men know something lies dying on the earth. Such are the signs given for men to see and be wise." Then he lapsed into silence, and again drew laboriously at his pipe. Presently he rose, and walked towards the door ; then he turned and looked at the boys as they sat quietly

\* "Hush ! Do not make a noise."

† "Shut the door."

smoking, with not a vestige of consternation on either of their faces.

"You are not afraid?" he asked of Risk. "And you, Risk's Hand,\* are you not afraid?"

"No," they both answered; while Risk continued, "No, Tosi; for we know that if you kill fifty Englishmen, twenty thousand other Englishmen will eat *you*."

"I have spoken," answered Tosi. "You, Risk, gave bread and help once to him who stands before you, when you found him lying where some Fingo dog had left him, after nearly killing him; and Tosi has not forgotten. He now has imperilled his life to make a small return by warning you, for if seen, he will be——" and he drew his fingers across his throat to emphasise his meaning.

"One word more," he continued, after a pause. "When the lion is hungry, he hunts for food." He pointed as he spoke in the direction of the store, and before the boys had comprehended his meaning, he had opened the door and slipped out.

"Well, I declare! Events do follow each other rapidly," said Risk, after a pause, during which they sat, each probably waiting for the other to speak. "Do you know what he meant by that last remark?"

"No; in fact, I could only understand that he was saying something about 'lion' and 'hungry.'"

Risk explained the remark. "This means that our store will probably be looted either to-night or within a few days, to provide food for the warriors when war is actually on."

After some consultation, they decided that they would take turns to sleep and watch.

Morton took the first watch. He sat down on a chair within the door, the bottom half of which was bolted, while the top half was left open. From here he could command a view of the whole front of the place, and, every now and again, he would walk to the little

\* The name given by the natives to Morton.

window at the back of the hut to see that all was right there.

His three hours passed without event, and he awoke his chum, and then lay down himself and was soon sound asleep.

But nothing disturbed them that night, nor the next, nor the next. The natives came and went to the store just as usual, buying goods and selling skins and wool, and never dropped a word which might cause the partners to think that anything was amiss. So quietly everything went on, that they began to think there had been a false alarm. But this idea was soon to be dispelled.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NIGHT ALARM—TOSI TO THE RESCUE

THE revolvers had arrived from East London, and Morton and Risk were sitting one night looking at them. The merchant who had supplied them evidently meant that they should not rust for want of use, for he had sent an abundant supply of cartridges with them.

"Seems as if we shall have no use for these after all," grumbled Morton, "unless we rig up a sort of target and practise upon that."

"Don't be too sure, my boy. If you ask me, this is only the calm preceding an unusually severe storm. Come here," Risk added, as he walked to the door. "Do you know what that means, and that, and that?" pointing to several fires at long intervals along the mountains. "Those are summonses to the people in outlying parts of the country to assemble. Listen!" and he held up his finger.

From afar off came the sounds of singing, and short low throbs at quick intervals.

"That's a war dance, or I'm much mistaken; I saw it once acted by twenty or thirty natives in King.\* Let us have a last look round. I'll take the first three hours to-night, Harold, if you don't mind, as I know these people and their ways a little better than you do, and I think I should discover them sooner than you, should they attempt to loot our store to-night."

\* King William's Town.

"All right, old chap; I've no objection," answered Harold, as they walked out; and, having satisfied themselves that all was right, they retired. At least, Harold did, while Ivor sat watching, with rifle across his knee and revolver in his pocket.

An hour passed, still nothing disturbed the serenity of the place. Two hours went by, and still the night lay quiet and dark on the face of the earth. Then the sky lightened with the approach of the moon. Up she came, slowly and full, and, as she peeped over the distant hills, her kindly smile lit up everything with soft and clear rays.

Still the night wore on, and Risk stirred slightly, preparatory to rising in order to awaken Morton, for his three hours were just completed.

The sound of cocks crowing, to welcome what they thought was the morn, could be heard all over the place. Far away, an old rooster, belonging to a Kafir, would join in the chorus, then a bird belonging to a nearer hut would take up the strain.

"Hullo! *That* must be an old bird," Risk said to himself, as he heard a hoarse sort of a crow near to the hut. "But," he thought, as an idea struck him, "we have no fowls on that side of the hut: ours are all safe in the stable—I saw them there myself when we went for our final inspection." And, he reasoned, it could hardly be a Kafir's fowl, for the nearest hut was some distance away, and it was extremely unlikely that any bird would stray so far at night. Besides which, the Kafirs were very careful about all their live stock, and generally saw that everything was safe in the neighbourhood of their huts before retiring to rest.

"Ah! I thought so," he exclaimed to himself, rising and crossing the floor quietly to where Harold lay asleep. "Harold, old fellow, wake up; but be very quiet about it. I think the Kafirs are here."

Then he resumed his place at the door, where he was speedily joined by Morton.

Again the cock crew, and it was answered by another

a little way to the right. The boys looked in the direction from whence the sound came, and there they saw a dark figure lying prone on the ground. As they watched, it moved forward with a snakelike motion, and again stopped ; then on again. Another figure now appeared, and another, and still another, until the whole place seemed swarming with gigantic black snakes.

That the object was primarily loot and not murder seemed evident, for the figures made straight for the store. If they had meant to attack the hut, they would have risen and charged when within a few yards of it, for they knew they could easily overpower the two men.

"I don't want to kill any of them," whispered Risk, "for as far as we know a state of war does not yet exist, and we must be careful not to hasten it, or it will be worse for other traders, who may not yet be prepared."

So they decided to fire a few shots in the air, to see if that would not frighten the intruders away.

"Now," said Risk, and almost simultaneously their rifles cracked out.

"Whou!" sang a chorus of voices, and as with one accord the figures rose and made for shelter. Here they stood chatting volubly together.

"The night has eyes," said one.

"Yes ; and ears too," said another.

"How many are there?" asked one, who evidently was a stranger in that district, or he would have known.

On receiving a reply, he suggested that they should attack the hut, and "eat up" the two. This evidently met with a certain amount of approval from some of the others, for, from stray words which reached the boys, it seemed that they were devising some plan of attack.

"Well, it seems as if we shall be compelled to fire into them in self-defence," remarked Morton, as about fifty of the men left their shelters and came charging towards them.

"Yes ; but I fear it's all up with us, for we shan't be able to keep them out long."

On they came, shouting as they advanced, and waving their knobkerries and assegais.

Suddenly a tall figure sprang out from the other side, and advanced towards the approaching crowd.

"Tosi !" exclaimed both Harold and Ivor in a breath, as they recognised him.

"What is this ?" cried Tosi ; and instantly the yelling ceased, for Tosi was a man of some authority, being one of Kreli's favourites and a petty chief.

"Who gave you leave to make war ?" he cried to the foremost warrior. "Do you not know that the king has not yet said to his dogs, 'Go forth and kill' ? Go !" and he pointed in the direction from whence they had come. "Go, and await the bidding of your king."

Then he strode after them, and Engwenza was left in peace for yet another night.

Harold and Ivor realised that they had run as narrow a squeak as they were ever likely to run. But for Tosi's providential arrival on the spot, it is certain neither of them would now have been alive. Yet of such chances is life made up.

Early next morning a trader from a station some miles distant dashed up on horseback ; hatless, coatless, breathless he came, without even a saddle on his horse.

"I scarcely hoped to find you chaps alive," he cried, as he drew up. "My station was raided last night, and everything taken away, and my assistant assegaid while we were defending the place. After that, I managed to escape, and had only just got on my horse when I was seen, and the crowd charged after me."

Upon receipt of this news, Morton and Risk decided to collect what livestock they possessed, and bring everything within the kraals, and remain on the place until plans were formulated for the future.

On being pressed, Ferror, the trader who had just arrived, agreed to stay with them for the present.

Indeed, he was very glad of the offer, for, since his own home had been burnt, he had nowhere else to go.

Later on in the day word was brought them that war had actually been declared, and the three were advised to leave everything and to fall back on Itsobi, where a laager had been formed. But Harold and Ivor were loth to leave everything to the tender mercies of the Kafirs, and Ferror would not leave them, although they urged him to do so. So the messenger took back word that the three had decided to stay on. Whether this decision was wise or not will be seen later on.

## CHAPTER VII

### MORE FUGITIVES

TWO days, after the events recorded in the last chapter, passed quietly away. That is to say, nothing occurred actually, though of rumours there were plenty—some of an obviously exaggerated nature ; but many were of undeniable truth, for they carried with them proof.

At Zalawbe, a trading-station about one hundred miles north of Engwenza, the Kafirs had made a determined attack, and had murdered the trader and his family, and then, after helping themselves to everything they could carry away, they set fire to the store and houses.

Morton, Risk, and Ferror still remained on at Engwenza, for the two former were determined to guard their possessions to the last, and Ferror, who liked the two young fellows, would not leave them alone in their danger. Again and again the magistrate of Itsobi sent messages urging them to come into the laager, but they still adhered to their determination.

Early one morning, just as the sun was peeping over the distant mountains, Risk, who was keeping watch while the other two took their turn of sleep, saw a small cloud of dust far out on the road. Thinking that this might be an indication of the approach of the enemy, he instantly awakened Morton and Ferror, and together the three watched the dust, which seemed to approach nearer and nearer every minute.

"It's a cart," said Risk, as he caught sight of something white amidst the dust.

"Yes," answered Ferror, who had been standing a few yards off saying nothing, "and it is travelling mighty fast. The one who drives that there vehicle happens to have cause for hurry, I'm thinking."

On it came. Now the cart could be distinctly seen and the pair of black nags which were bringing it along. Now it was only about a mile away, and the sound of the galloping animals on the hard road came up clearly on the still morning air.

The animals as they approached nearer appeared to be fagged out, for they galloped with a floundering sort of gait. So far only one person could be seen in the cart, and he was lying back with the reins held loosely in his hand. The horses, regardless of him, kept to the road.

Running down to the road-side, the three hailed the driver, or rather the passenger, for as he merely had the reins in his hands and appeared oblivious to the course the horses were taking, he could scarcely be called the driver.

At the sound of the shouts, however, he sat up and looked wonderingly around as if in a dream, and then they noticed that his head was bound up with a blood-stained handkerchief. Seeing the three white men he drew up, and they rushed to the side of the cart; but he had fallen back again, and they saw that he had swooned.

Quickly Ferror lifted him out and carried him to the hut, where he applied the usual restoratives and left his companions to bring the cart on.

Risk took the horses' heads, while Morton sprang in to take the reins. Scarcely, however, had he done so, when an exclamation from him caused Risk to turn his head round; then, seeing Morton looking intently behind himself in the cart, Risk left the horses' heads and got on the cart step.

In the back seat, reclining amongst some rugs and

pillows, sat, or rather lay, a young girl of nineteen or perhaps twenty years. Her bright golden hair hung wildly over her shoulders. Her face was white and still, the long lashes of her eyes lying softly on her colourless cheek. The white nightgown, partly covered by the rug, and her bare feet, which protruded, told without words that her departure from wherever she came had been hurried.

"Is she dead?" asked Risk, as he looked in.

Morton put his head upon her breast, and for a moment there was silence.

"No," he said, "her heart still beats."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Risk.

Morton gathered up the reins. "Come, jump in, Ivor," he said, "we may save her yet"; and he turned the horses' heads towards the huts.

Gently they lifted her from the cart and carried her inside. A few drops of raw brandy were poured into her mouth, and in a few minutes she moved restlessly, then moaned slightly.

Very gently they tended her, and at last their efforts bore fruit, for she opened her eyes and gazed first at one and then the other.

"Where am I?" she asked; and somehow, as her low, sweet, musical voice struck upon Morton, the blood in his veins seemed to stand still for a second, and then coursed through them warmer than ever in an unaccountable manner.

"Hush! Don't speak now, miss," he replied. "You are with friends."

"Yes; but—just tell me, where are the others?"

"I don't know; you came here with a gentleman in a cart."

"Oh, I remember now," she cried, and, covering her face with her hands, she fell back again in a dead faint, as the memory of what had occurred came back to her.

"Come here, one of you," called Ferror, from the next room. "Make haste!" And Risk hurried off, leaving

Morton to administer the necessary restoratives to the lady.

One look, and he knew what had happened. The man was dying. Ferror was half lying across the bed supporting him, but his face told plainly that life was fast ebbing. Risk seized the brandy and was about to apply it to the sufferer's lips ; but Ferror waved it away. "Won't do any good, Risk," he said quietly ; and while the words were still on his lips a gurgling sound came from the throat of the man in his arms. A short struggle, and then he fell back, dead. For a moment there was silence, and then Ferror moved to lay out the dead man before the body should stiffen.

"This is what did the deed," he said, as his hand struck against something hard, which he took hold of. It was a broken piece of spear, stuck in the unfortunate man's side.

Having done the last services, they went to see if they could be of any assistance to Morton. The young lady had recovered from her swoon and was now sleeping calmly, while Morton sat beside her holding her hand ; so Risk and Ferror retired outside and sat down to talk the matter over.

Ferror told Risk that when the man recovered after he had brought him in, he was perfectly conscious for a little while, and during that time he had hurriedly told him all that had occurred.

The man was a trader named Dale, and he lived on a station about thirty miles away. Miss Delton was governess to his children.

Last night, at about ten o'clock, he was in his stable, when a native told him that the Kafirs were fast approaching. Hastily ordering the boy to harness the horses to the cart, he ran to the house to fetch his wife and the two children and their governess ; but before he had gone far he saw the family rush out towards him. Mrs. Dale was carrying the elder child, and Miss Delton the younger.

When about fifty yards from him, he saw dark

forms glide from the side of the house, and with spears and assegais attack Mrs. Dale. Then another party made for Miss Delton, and just at that moment she stumbled, and the little girl fell out of her arms, and quickly she was killed before both their eyes.

All this had happened in a moment of time. Maddened, he raised his revolver as he neared the crowd, and fired into it. For a moment the savages, thus unexpectedly attacked, for they had not seen him coming on, fell back, and so allowed Miss Delton to gain a little.

Seeing that she might be saved, and knowing that those whom he loved were beyond all aid, he seized her in his arms and made for the cart ; but the natives quickly realised that they had retreated on a false alarm, thinking that the shot which had been fired into their midst was the forerunner of more, and they now charged madly after the flying man. But he was some distance away from them, and they now saw the cart standing waiting for the fugitives ; the horses, frightened by the voices of the natives shouting, were pawing the ground madly.

Zip, sang an assegai as it flew past. Zip, went another ; then another,—but still Dale had staggered on with his burden. Then one grazed his head, making a gash, from which the blood flowed quickly. Now the cart was gained, and springing on, he flung Miss Delton in ; he himself still stood on the step, while the horses plunged forward.

Just as he dragged himself in, he must have received the assegai which they found in his side, but of this he had said nothing. All he said further was that just as they were moving off the foremost native had reached the cart, dragged the driver off, and clubbed him. Dale fired, and brought down the murderer. A dozen more sprang forward, clutching at the horses' heads, but the maddened animals were off before they were touched, and though scores of spears rained round and on the cart, they managed to get away.

For miles the terrified horses kept up their wild, headlong gallop, and then Dale drew them in and eased their speed, so as to save them as much as possible. When, however, he saw the station in the distance, and knowing that his strength was fast failing, he had again beaten the horses into a gallop in order to reach some place of safety for Miss Delton. As they had neared the place his strength had given way, and thus it was that the cart had come up with him lying back in a fainting condition.

This was all that Dale had been able to communicate before he again swooned, and when he came to himself Ferror had seen that the end was near.

After Ferror had repeated the tale both men sat quietly thinking for a time ; then Ferror spoke. " We must bury the poor chap at once, Risk, for we may not be able to find time later on." So they moved off in silence to perform their sad task.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SILVER LINING OF THE CLOUD

IT was evening, and Miss Delton, who had recovered from the first effects of the shock of the previous night and the long subsequent drive, was sitting in a Madeira chair outside the hut which had been placed at her disposal.

Her face bore traces of the great grief which was in her heart at the cruel fate which had befallen her friends, and every now and again she would burst into tears as the horrible memory of the previous night crossed her mind. Then she would struggle to forget all that had transpired, and would for a while succeed in composing herself.

But she felt nervous and unstrung, for what girl could undergo an experience such as had been hers and not be upset altogether by it? Her nervous system had sustained such a shock as would require months, perhaps years, to completely recover from.

But with all her deep sorrow at the loss of those whom she had truly loved, and despite the revulsion of feeling which came to her at the thought of that terrible scene she had witnessed, there was one thing which buoyed her up—something which had, as it were, entered into her very soul, and not only had made her great sorrow bearable, but had made her feel as if the past events, sad and terrible as they were, had not happened in vain.

What was this great something; this undefinable and yet real feeling which had crept into her?

She wondered ; but think as she would, she could find no answer to the questions she asked herself. All that she was conscious of was a feeling of joy mixed with her terrors and sorrows. What was it, and whence did it come ?

She was clad in a loose grey gown, which, together with a few other articles of apparel which she had hastily snatched up as she made her flight, was all that she possessed.

As she reclined back in the basket-work chair before the open door of the rude hut, with the last rays of the fast sinking sun striking upon her and lighting up her sad face and beautiful golden hair, she made a picture such as any artist would make undying fame by, could he but truly depict it upon his canvas. Her throat was shapely and white, while her large, deep blue eyes, so expressive of thought, were in themselves sufficient to stamp the owner with the name of beautiful, even were the other features ever so commonplace. But they were anything but commonplace. Not a feature but evinced beauty ; not a line that did not show character.

Thus she had been sitting for about an hour. The three young men had thought it best to tell her of the sad end of Mr. Dale, and though she had taken this last blow quietly enough, they knew that she felt it none the less keenly.

When she had awakened from the sleep we saw her in, in the last chapter, she had felt much better. After dinner Morton had insisted on her resting again, which she had done, and when she woke up she felt so much herself that she went outside to get a little fresh air after the stuffiness of the hut.

Outside she found a chair and sat down in it, wondering which of the three had had the forethought to place it there for her ; for she felt sure it had been placed there for her use.

In the kraal which stood about fifty yards away she could see two figures, which she soon recognised

as belonging to Risk and Ferror. They were attending to the horses, and putting things generally right for the approaching night. Away across the veldt the almost countless huts lay. Not a soul was stirring about amongst them ; they seemed quite deserted, but she knew they were not.

Suddenly, as she sat quietly gazing at the surrounding scene, she heard a quick step, and some one came round the hut from the back, and she, being nervous and unstrung, started perceptibly.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Miss Delton," said a voice. "I never meant to startle you ; I should have been more careful."

Something in the earnestness of the tone caused her to look up in the speaker's face, and as her eyes met his she suddenly, as if she read it in those dark brown eyes which were gazing so intently and yet so softly into hers, realised what that peculiar something was which had puzzled her so much. She now knew what it was that had brought consolation into her heart, and had made even her very sorrow to seem sweet. Yes ! she now knew full well what it all meant. It was the realisation that the man who now stood before her, so strong, so handsome, and in her eyes so good, was the personification of the ideal that her heart and mind had conceived. It was as though she were looking at a mirror, in which every line and feature were reflected back, each to each ; and just so now, every line and feature of the real reflected back the image in her heart. All this passed through her mind like a flash of lightning, and her heart beat with a great joy, while her cheeks were instantly suffused with a warm red glow, which, but for the fading light, might easily have been recognised as a blush ; but as it was, it passed Morton's observation, or if he had noticed it, he was quite ignorant that he himself was the cause of it, and would have explained it to himself as being consequent upon the start which he had just been the cause of, by coming so suddenly round the hut,

Miss Delton's flush was but momentary, and by an effort she quickly recovered herself as she answered him.

"The fault was not yours, Mr. Morton, but mine. I am stupid to be easily startled; but then, you know——"

"Yes, indeed I do, Miss Delton; but don't think of that now." Then, as if to change the subject to other things, and to introduce another train of thought, he added, "Ferror and Risk seem busy, don't they?"

"Yes, I've been watching them for a little while. What are they doing?"

Morton replied, and then the conversation drifted into general matters, and so engrossed did the two become in it, that they never heard the others returning until they were right up to them.

"I am afraid, Mr. Risk, that I am trespassing very much indeed," said Miss Delton, as Risk and Ferror joined them. "Mr. Morton has just told me that the hut you have given me is the one you gentlemen usually occupy."

"Oh, that's nothing, Miss Delton. We will sleep in the kitchen-hut just as comfortably, and besides that, only two of us can sleep at one time, as the third has to keep watch, in case our friends the Kafirs attempt a surprise."

"Well, then, will you make a bargain with me, if I consent to allow myself to impose upon you?" she asked.

"Yes, I'll promise," answered Risk, rashly.

"Well, as you have promised, I'll tell you the condition upon which I'll consent to intrude. I want you to allow me to see to the meals while I am here. Come! I'll begin at once"; and she rose without even waiting to hear if her terms were agreed to.

Morton urged Risk to give her her own way, as he realised how good it would be to keep her employed, so as to divert her mind.

So Risk made no objections, and was soon assisting

Miss Delton to lay the cloth on the tea-table and prepare the evening meal.

When all was ready the three men tossed up, as to who should take watch while the others had their meal, and the lot fell upon Morton, who was rather pleased than otherwise; for he knew that when Ferror and Risk had finished they would go outside for their evening smoke, and he would then have the hut and Miss Delton entirely to himself.

His surmise proved correct, for after about twenty minutes had elapsed the two men came out, and called to him to go in at once or the tea would get cold.

How delicious that cup of tea tasted, and what a flavour those hot ash-cakes had! It seemed as if he had never enjoyed a meal so much in his life before. And how delightful the conversation was! But all good things must have an end, and surely never had any good thing been comparable to this.

After assisting Miss Delton to clear away the tea-things, Morton accompanied her to the door of her hut, and there said good night, for she was tired out with all that had happened.

"Good night, Miss Delton," he said, as he took her hand. "Don't think about things more than you can help; promise me that you won't."

"I will promise. Good night!"

"Good night!"

Then, just as she turned to enter the hut, Morton said, as a sudden thought occurred to him: "Sleep just as you are, Miss Delton, and don't undress. I don't want to alarm you; but it is necessary that you should be ready to leave with us at a moment's notice, should the Kafirs show themselves."

## CHAPTER IX

### IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT—A DASH FOR SAFETY

“**C**OME on, old chap, get up. It's close upon two o'clock.”

Morton rose from his bed on the floor and looked bewildered for a moment; then, as he grew wider awake, he sprang up with alacrity.

“Right you are, Ivor, old boy. Have you seen or heard anything suspicious?”

“No, I can't say that I have; though, when I relieved Ferror at midnight, he told me that just before I came out he had observed four or five bright lights along the mountains, which seemed to lighten up and die out at short intervals for a few moments, and then vanish altogether. But I don't think it is anything.”

Morton took all this in, but answered nothing, though he determined to keep a keener watch than ever.

Risk returned to the hut to take his few hours' sleep, and Morton, after pacing up and down for half an hour or so, sat down to think over the events of the past day.

Then his thoughts wandered back to the days he had spent in Cape Town. He thought of her whom he had thought he loved. Where was she now, he wondered, and what was she doing? But the thought was merely a passing one and brought no pleasure with it, and, strange to say, no bitterness. A month—nay, less—a week, or even twenty-four hours ago, the

same thought would have caused him to frown, and perhaps feel hurt; but to-night—ah! to-night it was quite different. And why? Well, the answer lay in the person of one who was lying asleep not fifteen yards away. The answer was, because another had entered into his life. And with the thought of her Morton's face brightened. Yes; he knew that at last he had met with the only girl who would ever fill any place in his heart. Now he realised that the other had been a mere fancy, a boyish infatuation. Then a thought crossed his mind, and he frowned.

"Bah! What a fool I am," he muttered to himself. "I hardly know the girl, and she may be betrothed to another for anything I know, or she may never grow to care for me. I have hardly known her half a day, and yet here I am, fancying myself in love with her. What an ass I am!" But in his heart, too, there was a little image, and he too realised that Dorothy Delton was the real of that ideal.

Then the thought of that long look came to him, and he felt that that had told him that he could hope, and with the thought his face again brightened.

Not a sound could be heard. The night was calm and still. Not a light was visible save the light of the stars, which twinkled brightly in the canopy of the heavens above. Then the eastern horizon began to brighten, and presently, up came the moon, and with its appearance an old rooster belonging to one of the huts on the little rise opposite began to crow; then another answered, and yet another farther away, and soon the whole country around seemed full of sound as the chorus rang out. This continued for about fifteen minutes, and then, as if they had discovered that daylight was still some hours away, and that the moon was not the rising sun, the crowing gradually died away until all was silence again.

Morton was beginning to feel sleepy again, and he looked at his watch. It was a quarter to one. Another forty-five minutes and he would be back in his bed.

He rose and walked about, as if fearful lest he might be tempted to forget himself for a moment and doze off to sleep, and he extended his beat this time to a little tree standing about forty yards from the nearest hut, and which, being on the top of the little eminence whereon the huts were built, gave him a fine look-out.

Reaching the little tree, he leaned against the trunk and continued his train of thought. But his good intention failed him this time, for worn out with the trying day and the anxious days which had preceded it, he allowed himself to close his eyes and forget his important duty for—so it seemed—just a moment.

Suddenly he started awake and looked around. "What was it?" A presentiment of impending trouble was on him. Surely he had heard a sound. No! Everything seemed just as it had been. Not a sound came from anywhere. But the moon was now high up, and as it had only just risen clear of the horizon when he had first stood under the branches, Morton knew that he must have slept nearly half an hour.

Wide awake now, he stood stock-still in the shadow of the tree, and with every faculty strained to its utmost capacity, he waited. Minute after minute passed—still the watcher scarcely stirred a muscle.

Something was wrong!; of that he felt certain, for he felt terribly nervous and the cold sweat stood in drops on his forehead.

Feeling that something should be done, and yet not knowing what to do, he remained where he was for some minutes longer. Then, having decided upon a course of action, he left the tree, and, seeking the shade as much as possible, so as not to be observed by any one who might be about, crawled on hands and knees to the kraal, and quietly loosening the four horses, led them towards the hut, and tied them loosely to a pole which stood under the window of the hut which Miss Delton occupied.

Then he resumed his place under the tree, where he

could see and not be seen, and this time he determined to keep awake, and he knew he would keep his resolve, for the horrible feeling of unrest still had possession of him. A branch cracked somewhere, and in a moment he was all eyes and ears.

Suddenly, he saw a small black object approaching the farther hut, and he looked intently ; it was on the side farthest from him. Then another, and another. The rays of the moon at that moment struck on something bright, and Morton knew that the objects were Kafirs, with their fearful weapons, creeping up in their usual stealthy way, to sack the station and murder its inhabitants in cold blood.

Drawing his revolver, he bounded from his shady retreat, and with a shout to warn the inmates of the huts of their danger, he fired at the nearest figure, which was a distance of close upon sixty yards from him.

The natives rose and retreated for a moment, startled by the suddenness of the attack upon them, and Morton saw that they were in great numbers. Almost simultaneously with the shot, Risk and Ferror rushed out, and as Morton joined them, they fired into the retreating mass. The shots all seemed to take effect, for three men were seen in the bright moonlight to leap high into the air, and then to fall in lifeless lumps on the earth.

The retreat was but momentary, for with a hideous roar the Kafirs stopped suddenly, and then came charging back.

"Go, Morton," cried Risk: "take Miss Delton and make for Itsobi."

"The horses are all here," hoarsely answered Morton. "Come along."

Then the three rushed out from the shelter of the hut, and, firing another volley, they made for the horses.

Morton rushed first for Miss Delton's door, but she was already standing beside the horses, and seeing them



“On they tore, with the infuriated mob behind them, and the human cordon closing in front of them only about fifty yards away.”

[To face p. 44.



come up, she hastily slipped the halter rein in one animal's mouth and sprang on its back. She had, in the meantime, also loosened the other three, and she called out to them as they reached her that she had done so.

Almost simultaneously the three sprang on their horses, and turned them away; but the danger was not yet over. The maddened Kafirs were now but a few yards behind, and numbers could be seen closing around them in a great circle.

Lashing the animals with the ends of the reins, they tore away. Whiz, whiz, sang a score of assegais past them, but somewhat wide. On they tore, with the infuriated mob behind them, and the human cordon closing in front of them only about fifty yards away.

Whiz, plick! And three of them knew that one of their number had fallen. It was Ferror, they knew, for they heard him call out bravely to them to ride on. His horse was unhurt, for it raced past them and through the crowd in front.

Miss Delton rode in the middle, and Morton on her left. She was calm and collected, and guided her horse with a firm hand.

"Now, Miss Delton, keep straight on," cried Morton, as they approached the crowd. "Fire, Risk," and the two revolvers cracked out sharply amongst the roar of voices.

Now they were right in amidst the crowd. Assegais whizzed past like rain, and Morton felt a stinging sensation in his left arm; then something like red-hot iron struck his head: but on they went, until they had passed through, and the crowd was once more yelling behind. But they were now out of reach of the assegais, and felt almost safe.

"Are you all right, Miss Delton?" asked the two boys almost in one breath, as, after riding at a mad gallop in silence for ten minutes or more, they drew rein to allow the horses to blow.

"Yes, thanks," she answered in low, sweet tones,

"but I think my horse is hurt." Scarcely had she spoken the words when the animal began to totter.

To save Miss Delton from a fall, Morton put out his right arm and skilfully lifted her off her animal and placed her before him, and he had only just done this when her horse fell to the ground and rolled over, dead.

Then on they went again, and did not stop until they felt that they had put a good many miles between themselves and the savage horde.

"Are you hurt at all, Morton?" asked Risk, as they drew up.

"Yes, I am, but not much. How did you fare?"

"Oh, pretty badly," Risk answered. "I have a cut across the face, and my foot is rather damaged."

Miss Delton was on the ground in a second. "Oh, do let me dress both your wounds," she said. "You have both been so brave and so good."

Hastily turning to Morton, she was startled to see his face was one mass of blood.

"Oh! How terrible!" she cried, and making him dismount from his horse she hastily set about bandaging his wounded head with strips of her handkerchief.

Then she tore up his and Risk's handkerchiefs in the same way, and bound up their other wounds.

None of these were serious, but they were all fearfully painful, and they had both lost a large quantity of blood and felt weak.

"Let us hurry away now," she said; then, turning round to look in the direction of Engwenza, she exclaimed, "See, they are burning the huts. Oh, *what* a merciful escape ours has been," and she shuddered at the thought of the terrible death they had escaped.

Then they mounted again and rode on slowly, so as to spare the horses as much as possible, for Itsobi was still far off.

On they rode in silence, for each of the three seemed too much engaged with his or her own thoughts to speak.

They all were thinking of their marvellous escape,

and of poor Ferror's sad end, for none of them doubted but that the cruel savages had killed him as he fell. Morton's thoughts turned to the sweet girl seated on the horse before him, and his heart seemed almost to stand still with horror as he thought what her end would have been had she fallen into the wretches' hands.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed under his breath, and shuddered; but she heard him and looked up.

Risk had fallen back a few yards, and was almost oblivious to the couple riding in front, so engrossed was he in his thoughts.

"What is it, Mr. Morton? Are your wounds troubling you?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Miss Delton, it was only a thought."

"Won't you tell me, Mr. Morton; or is it something which you would rather not say?"

"No, Miss Delton, it was not. I did not mean you to hear the expression, and in fact, I was not aware that I had uttered it, until you asked. The truth is, the horrible thought of what would have happened to you, had you been caught, came into my mind."

"Oh! You and Mr. Risk are so good, always to be thinking of me and not of yourselves. But don't think about these terrible things now; let us forget them for a while."

And Morton suddenly realised that his duty lay in removing her thoughts from their present unhappy lot, and he hastened to turn the subject to other things.

On they rode, speaking as they went on all sorts of subjects, until they realised that the morning was beginning to dawn.

Risk now trotted up to them, and bade them halt for half an hour or so.

"We are only about thirty minutes' ride from Itsobi; but the horses are tired, and as there is no fear of the natives here, we might as well let the poor animals rest."

The rest over they again mounted, and soon they

saw the few scattered white houses of the village lying before them.

Here they were joyfully received, for the villagers, having heard through friendly natives of the attack on Dale's station, had mourned all its inhabitants as dead; and knowing that Engwenza lay right in the way to Itsobi, they had feared that the same fate had befallen its inhabitants. A relief party would have been sent out, but the men who constituted the garrison of the village were few, and an attack on it was hourly expected.

Miss Delton was welcomed by the magistrate's wife, Mrs. Warren, who took her into her house, while Morton and Risk were quartered with the other men in the fort.

## CHAPTER X

### IN ITSObI

**H**AROLD MORTON and Ivor Risk were, as has already been said, with the other men who formed the defence force of Itsobi, in the laager which had been made on a little hill immediately outside the village, and which commanded an excellent outlook on one side.

At the back of the village, and between it and a rather high hill with two conical shaped peaks, ran the Xosi river, a little stream at present not more than about twenty-four yards wide, but which, in time of flood, overflowed its banks and formed a very wide and turbulent river. The road from Itsobi to the next village crossed the river by means of a roughly constructed wooden bridge, and then continued up and over the hill between the two peaks.

At the top of the hill, just where the road passed over it, one of the outposts was stationed ; and although from this point the enemy, if they contemplated an attack from that quarter, could not be discerned until they were right on to it, as from here the road wound round and round several spurs of this and other hills, still it afforded the best spot for an outlook on that side of the village and gave at least some safeguard to those in the village, against a sudden attack from that quarter ; for though there would be but a poor chance for the sentry stationed there, should the enemy come up that way, yet he would be able to warn the

inhabitants of the village by firing off his rifle. Consequently, there were very few who cared to volunteer for a post so dangerous, and those who did actually go never felt very confident that they would return in safety.

Had the garrison been any stronger, sentries would also have been posted on each side of the hill; but as it was, the total strength numbered only twenty men, of whom half were scarcely more than boys.

It had been arranged that at the first sound of warning the entire population would go into the laager, which had been well provisioned in every way, even to a supply of water, which was kept in three large casks.

The defence force of the village consisted, as has been said, of twenty men, of whom the magistrate was captain; and, indeed, a better man for the position could not have been found, for he had served in several of the earlier Kafir wars, where he had gained some distinction. At the very first sign of unrest among the natives he had communicated with the Colonial Government, asking that reinforcements might be sent immediately; but matters had developed so rapidly that he feared the messenger he had sent had either not got through with the despatch or else had deserted to the enemy.

The day after the fugitives from Engwenza had arrived, Mr. Warren was walking up and down on his stoep smoking, when Morton came up to the garden gate, and seeing him, Mr. Warren walked down the path to meet him.

"Well, Mr. Morton, and how are you after yesterday's adventures?" he asked, as he shook the newcomer by the hand.

"I am well, thanks, Mr. Warren, and have come to give you a report of the affair, and also to inquire after Miss Delton."

"Poor girl," muttered Mr. Warren, shaking his head sadly—"poor girl! She has gone through very trying times, and has had some very narrow escapes. I have

known her for some two or three years now, and both my wife and I are very much attached to her." Then, seeing Morton looked interested, he continued: "I knew her father years ago, when we were at school together, and afterwards, when I was appointed to Barkly, I renewed the acquaintance. Dorothy was then a little girl of—let me see"—reflecting for a moment—"well, she is about twenty now, and that was nine years ago; yes, she was then a little dot of eleven. Her father died shortly after I left Barkly to take up this appointment, and a few years ago she came down here as governess to Dale's kiddies. Whenever she comes to Itsobi she always stays with us; for if she did not my wife would be grievously offended. She is also passionately attached to my wife and my two youngsters, and I must admit I am awfully fond of the little girl, and felt very anxious about her."

"And how is she to-day, Mr. Warren?" Morton asked.

Mr. Warren marked the half-suppressed eagerness in the tone of the question.

"She is well as far as her health is concerned; still, as must be expected, her spirits are not of the very brightest at present; but she'll get over it all in good time. Time never fails to heal the wounds, however sore they are. But come, tell me all you know about the attack on Dale's place and on yours, so that I may report to headquarters when I have the opportunity."

So Morton told all that he knew of the affair, and then Mr. Warren, after they had discussed several matters, made some excuse to go inside on the pretext of looking for something, and left Harold sitting there. A few minutes later the door leading on to the stoep opened, and, thinking that it was Mr. Warren, Morton looked up; but he was mistaken, for instead of the magistrate, there stood Miss Delton, looking, in the cool white dress which she had evidently borrowed from Mrs. Warren, more beautiful than ever. Her face was

sad and bore traces of her sorrows ; but seeing Morton, her eyes lighted up.

"Good morning, Mr. Morton. I did not expect to see you, as I thought you would be busy in the laager. Mr. Warren told me that some one wanted to see me on the stoep, and I thought it was Mrs. Warren, for she walked down to the library about half an hour ago."

Harold placed a chair for her, and together they sat conversing for some time on almost every conceivable subject but the events which had so recently transpired. Harold, knowing how deeply that subject affected her, very wisely steered as far clear of it as he could ; and she, perceiving this, felt more and more drawn to him because of his thoughtfulness.

Presently Mrs. Warren returned, and Miss Delton introduced her to Harold.

Mrs. Warren was a middle-aged lady of a very cheerful and engaging disposition, and she soon made Harold feel as if he had known her for years instead of but for a few minutes.

After conversing with them for a short while she went inside, and as she entered the door she looked back and called out to Miss Delton to make Mr. Morton stay for tea, which Miss Delton promptly did ; and though Morton demurred in a half-hearted way, as if he felt it to be his duty to do so, and urged that he might be needed at the fort, a little persuasion soon brought consent from him.

After tea the four sat out on the stoep again, for it was hot inside the house.

"Go and sing something for us, Dorothy dear," Mrs. Warren asked.

"Certainly, Mrs. Warren," answered the girl, always ready to oblige others, as she rose from her chair. "You must be very tired of all my old songs by now."

"No, dear, you know we are not ; and besides, it is so long since you last sang to us. Sing anything you like."

"Shall I turn the pages for you, Miss Delton?"

"No, thanks, Mr. Morton; I'll sing something that I know, and so will not need your services."

Then she went in, and soon through the open door of the sitting-room, which was also the dining-room, her clear sweet soprano voice came softly.

The song she sang was indeed an old one, but it was none the less sweet for that, and the voice, which rendered it with so much expression, seemed to feel each word. In parts, where the words brought her thoughts to what she had just undergone, her voice shook audibly with emotion, and when she reached those lines,

Some have gone from us for ever,  
Longer here they might not stay,  
They have reached a fairer region, far away,

she broke down completely, and, covering her face with her hands, she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Mrs. Warren rose and went in to her. "Don't cry, darling. Come, my child, don't! You have been so brave—don't give way now." Then, sitting down, she drew the poor girl to her knees, and lovingly stroked her beautiful soft hair. Gradually the sobbing grew less and less, until it ceased altogether.

"Now go and dry your tears, dearie, and come outside to us again. You need not be ashamed of your tears, darling." And, as Miss Delton went away to her room, Mrs. Warren rejoined her husband and Morton on the verandah.

"We had better not have any more singing to-night, Robert," she said to her husband. "Poor Dorothy is too much upset. It was thoughtless of me to have asked her to sing; but I thought it would serve to take her thoughts away from other things."

It was a long time before Miss Delton came out again, and when she did Morton was just about to go.

After shaking hands with Mrs. Warren and Miss Delton, he walked down to the gate, Mr. Warren accompanying him so far.

"I am afraid I'll have to ask you and Mr. Risk to undertake the guard on that hill to-morrow night, Mr. Morton, as the other men have already all had a turn, and I may tell you none of them fancy it particularly," Mr. Warren said, as they were about to part.

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Warren ; we are ready for any service you may appoint."

"Well, then, I'll see you to-morrow morning, and we'll talk the matter over. By the way," he added, just as he was turning away, and coming again towards the gate, "have you ever done any military service? I ask the question because I happened to see some plans which you made hurriedly for the trenches this morning, and they struck me as evincing some knowledge of military work."

"Yes, I do know something of military work, as I have been through Sandhurst ; but I only tell you this, Mr. Warren, because you have asked me the direct question, and I will feel greatly obliged to you if you don't mention the matter to any one else. I was going in for the army, but for some reason had to alter my plans at the last moment, just as I was about finished."

"All right, I'll promise not to say anything ; but now I will tell you my reason for wanting to know. I want you to act as my lieutenant, and if anything should befall me, you will assume entire command. Now, good night ! You must be tired."

"Good night, Mr. Warren."

Then, turning, Morton walked sharply to the tent in the laager which he and Risk were occupying together.

## CHAPTER XI

### CAPTURED

THREE weeks passed, and nothing very startling had occurred, beyond the fact that a party of Kafirs numbering about fifty had been seen near to the village.

The garrison had exchanged a few shots with them, but they were too far away for those within the laager to see whether any harm had been done to them. One man in the laager had had his arm struck by a bullet, but beyond that no one was even touched, and the man had almost quite recovered, for, as the range had been a very long one, the bullet was nearly spent when it struck him.

The party had evidently been sent out from the main force to reconnoitre, for, after hovering about for a little while at a respectful distance, they had gone off again. Most of the Kafirs were on foot, but a large number were mounted, and what was more serious was the fact that many of them appeared to be armed with fire-arms.

Mr. Warren had had a message saying that a party of the F.A.M.P. were coming as soon as possible to the assistance of the village, as it was thought that the Kafirs might be troublesome there; but the letter continued, "It is not anticipated that there will be any determined attack made on your village, as the enemy appear to be giving their attention to other parts of the country."

By this Mr. Warren knew that his letter had not reached its destination, for had it done so the reply

would have come immediately in the form of ample reinforcements; whereas, from the letter he gathered that the small force which actually was coming had been sent merely as a precautionary measure, and not because the authorities feared danger as far as Itsobi was concerned.

He immediately despatched another messenger, urging that a sufficiently strong force might be sent at once to assist in garrisoning the place, and to work in the district in order to quell the rebellion there.

Morton had only seen Miss Delton a few times since the evening he had spent at the magistrate's house. However, he promised himself that he would see her on the morrow, and the thought brought a look of pleasure into his face, and, as he busied himself with the kettle, he whistled merrily.

"You appear happy, Harold," said Risk. "I can't see any particular cause for happiness, when a man has to act as his own blooming cook."

"Oh, it's a new experience, and not bad fun for a change."

"Bless the fun! I am getting sick of the job, and I wish that scoundrel Roro were here to make the coffee. I will do as many guards as are necessary, but I'm bothered if I like this work."

And so the conversation rambled on as they worked, and despite Ivor's grumbling, they managed to grill some very respectable chops, which the trouble they had had in making caused them to enjoy more even than if Roro had prepared them.

After supper they sat with the other men around the camp fire, talking and smoking, and so the evening passed. As their turn for guard duty would come on at about three in the morning, Risk and Morton turned in early to bed, and were soon sound asleep.

\* \* \* \*

"Wake up, Harold."

Morton flew out of bed as Ivor caught him by his arm and called to him.

At the door of the tent he saw a figure standing, which by the light of the moon, he recognised as Mr. Warren.

"Mr. Warren has come down from his house to tell us that some Kafirs—how many he does not know himself—evading the sentries, came to his house and carried Miss Delton off," Ivor said hastily.

"My God!" Morton exclaimed, and stood staring at Mr. Warren as the latter proceeded to tell hurriedly how, about fifteen minutes ago, he had been awakened by the sound of horses galloping away, and going to his window he was just in time to see a troop of mounted Kafirs disappear. But in that brief glance, he saw a woman's figure, which he recognised as Dorothy's, on one of the horses, in the arms of a Kafir.

"Which direction did they take?" asked Morton, hoarsely.

"They went north-west, as if riding towards Engwenza."

"Then I shall follow them at once," Morton said; and his firm accents told plainer than words that, come what might, he was going.

"And I go with you, Harold," interposed Risk.

"Well, I can't and won't dissuade you fellows. Would to God that I could accompany you; but my duty lies here, and here I must stay until the relieving force arrives; and if it comes to-morrow, I shall send a party after you. Well, I must hurry back home. Call there before you leave."

Ivor had in the meantime gone off to fetch the horses, and, borrowing a couple of saddles from the men whom he had awakened for that purpose, he soon had the animals saddled and bridled, and brought them to the tent. Morton, with rifle strapped over his shoulders, was ready, and immediately they mounted and rode off to the Residency.

Here they stayed but a few minutes, and while Morton ran in to say good-bye to Mrs. Warren,

Mr. Warren gave Ivor some advice as to how they should act, and where they would most likely trace the Kafirs.

Morton soon came out, and brought with him a large parcel of sandwiches which Mrs. Warren had hastily cut, and a flask of brandy.

Hastily dividing the parcel, they mounted and again moved off, this time at a brisk gallop.

Mr. Warren stood watching the retreating figures until he could no longer see them, and then, as the sound of the galloping horses became fainter and fainter until it quite died away, he went inside and flung himself down on the couch in great grief.

"What will become of her?" he moaned; and his sorrow-stricken wife could give him no answer, for she was asking the same question over and over again to herself.

"Come, let us go to bed again; we can do no good sitting here, and we may be needed in the morning."

Then they retired to bed again, but not to sleep; for they could not ease their minds of the new and terrible anxiety which had fallen upon them. They were both deeply attached to Dorothy Delton, and now, when she had been taken away from under their very roof, their grief knew no bounds. They both knew the natives and what cruelty they were capable of, and as they thought of the many and cruel atrocities which these same people had perpetrated on former occasions, they felt fearful lest the same and worse might now befall Dorothy Delton.

How Morton and Ivor could possibly save her neither of them could think. Indeed, Mr. Warren wondered whether he had done right in allowing them to go; but then he knew that it would have been cruelty to have kept at least one of them back, and now, as he and his wife lay in bed, with sleep far away from them, he told her of his suspicions in regard to Morton and Dorothy, and to his surprise she told him that she too had observed matters, and not only

as far as Morton was concerned ; but that she was inclined to think that Dorothy was equally as deeply in love.

After galloping on for some time, during which neither spoke a word, Ivor suggested that they should draw rein for a few minutes.

"We must make our plans, Harold, before we go any farther. What do you propose?"

"I propose finding her and killing as many of those accursed rebels as possible," answered Morton, and Risk saw that his face was set firmly, and white with anxiety.

"Well, we must first find in which direction they have gone. Mr. Warren says they went off towards the north, but he told me when you went inside, that he knew they would not keep in that direction, but would branch off to the right or left after going straight for a few miles. When we find them we must be careful, or we shall lose our own lives, and then what chance of escape will she have? They had fully forty minutes' start of us, and it is safe to conjecture that they are a long way from this by now."

Getting off their horses, Harold looked about on the ground, but could find no traces of spoor. Then he walked on farther, and at last found marks on the soil which showed that a party of horsemen, numbering about twenty, had passed that way ; so, calling Ivor, they followed on the spoor, Harold leading his horse so as to be able to see in which direction it led.

Half an hour of this, and then they came upon soil so hard that not a mark could be seen upon it.

Making a circle, with the spot where the last trace lay as a centre, they gradually extended it ; but it was not before day had already dawned that they found the spoor again.

The direction which the traces indicated now lay almost at right angles to that along which they had come, and ran towards the north-east. By this time the horses were fairly done up, so they unsaddled in a

deep donga, and fed them with some chaff which Ivor had put in the saddle-bags, and watered them at a little spring near by. The halt was only intended to be a very brief one, in order to rest the horses, for the boys deemed it advisable to delay their much-needed sleep until the next halt, which they meant to make not far from their present camp.

## CHAPTER XII

### TOSI AGAIN

A BRIEF hour's rest, then into the saddle again and away. The hoof-marks could now be plainly seen, for the soil was fairly soft. So they rode on, for the greater part in silence, each bending down over the saddle with his eyes fixed on the ground, so as not to lose sight of the traces of the fugitives. Suddenly Morton drew up his horse, and sprang to the ground.

"They must have stopped here for a little while last night, or early this morning," he said. "Look, there is the place where they made a fire."

Then he darted suddenly down, and from off a little bush he pulled a scrap of paper, and read what was written on it to Risk.

"All well. Think my captors are taking me to their main body. They number fourteen. D.D."

"Well, it is at least satisfactory to learn that she is safe so far," Ivor said, after a moment's pause. "But I should like to know how we are going to get her away, should we be too late in over-hauling the little crowd before they rejoin their main body."

"The risk is pretty much the same, whether we are two against fourteen or two against fourteen hundred," answered Morton.

"Have you thought of any plan yet, Harold, as to how we are to act when we do come up with them?"

"No, old chap; but we will manage it somehow."

"Well, let us get on again, or shall we have something to eat first by way of breakfast?"

"I think we will off-saddle in that donga for the remainder of the day, so as to have our horses as fresh as possible for to-night," Morton answered; then after a pause, he continued:

"It is some hours since our last stop, and though the horses had some rest then, we have had none, and unless we try to get some sleep we will be quite unfit for what lies before us."

Risk agreed, so, suiting the action to the word, the saddles were soon taken off and the horses led down into the deep donga, where they could not be seen by any one passing.

Then, after making a meal of some of the sandwiches, the boys lay down in the soft sand at the bottom of the donga, and tired out after their long night's ride, they went off to sleep. When they awoke the sun was nearing the horizon, so Morton crept up the side and looked out cautiously; then, seeing that no one was about, they saddled, led the horses out, and resumed their ride.

Towards dusk they saw a belt of mimosa bushes lying before them, and as they approached nearer to it they heard the sound of water, as it rushed along in the shallow bed of the river, and, in fear lest some of the enemy might be lurking about the bushes, they determined to proceed with great caution.

When just about to enter the bush, Morton drew up and jumped down, flinging his reins to Ivor as he did so. "You wait here, Ivor, and I will go on foot down to the river; then if all is clear I'll come back and we'll cross."

Ivor assented, and Morton went off.

About a hundred yards from the edge of the bush where he had left Ivor with the horses ran the river, and, as Morton crept through to the bank on hands and knees, he looked carefully up and down; but not a soul was visible.

Down at the water's edge he saw footprints of the horses' hoofs.

"Oh!" he ejaculated, "they've crossed here right enough."

Then he determined that, before he returned to Ivor, he would cross the river himself and see in what direction the Kafirs had gone after fording; so, pulling off his clothes, he swam over.

The river was about sixty yards broad, but the water was flowing gently, so that he soon emerged on the other side. But here, to his chagrin, although the sand was damp for yards from the water's edge, he could find no trace of the party; so, after searching a bit, he walked down the river for two or three hundred yards, and then up it for the same distance from the point where he had come out, and still he could find no spoor.

It was now almost dark and he had to keep his eyes very close to the ground in order to see any marks; and as he could find nothing, he determined to recross and consult with Risk as to what steps they should take next. So without more ado he swam back, and having gained the bank he dressed, and went to where he had left Ivor and the horses.

"It's all right, Ivor," he said in a low tone, as he approached; for he heard Ivor cock his revolver.

"I thought it was you; but I didn't mean to be taken unawares, should it be any one else," Ivor answered, as he uncocked again. "Well, and what luck?"

Then Harold told him what he had discovered, or, to be more correct, what he had not discovered.

Morton was standing with his hand on Ivor's horse's neck, while Ivor himself sat in his saddle leaning down, so that they might converse in low tones.

Suddenly a branch cracked in a bush a few yards in front of them, and almost simultaneously both revolvers were cocked and levelled at the spot from where the sound appeared to have come.

"Don't shoot," came from the bush, in Kafir. "It is Tosi."

Then Tosi crept out and came towards them.

"What are you doing here, Tosi?" Ivor asked.

"I come to tell you news of the inkosazana \* for whom you search."

Ivor translated.

"Oh!" said Morton, eagerly. "Ask him what his news is, Ivor."

"The inkosazana," proceeded Tosi, without waiting for Ivor to put the question—"she is safe, and will not be harmed, for the chief wants her as his wife."

On Ivor translating what Tosi had said, Morton grew furious; but Ivor, perceiving this, touched him gently to indicate to him to be silent.

"When the moon is full," Tosi went on, "then will the chief take her; but now she will be put in a place of safety, and I come to tell you where it is. I knew you would come, for you white people think something of your women, while to us they are nothing but slaves."

"How did you know where to find us, Tosi?" Ivor asked.

"I was wandering about the veldt this morning, when I met the men who were carrying her away, and then I knew you would come after her; for when you rode that morning into Itsobi, after the warriors had burnt your kraal, I saw you and he ride past with the inkosazana. I was sitting behind a bush close to the road where you passed, so I knew she was something to you; and when I recognised her this morning I came at once to tell you, for you, Risk, are my friend."

"Well, where is she? Lead us to where they are hiding her," said Morton, impatiently, after he had been told what Tosi had said.

Risk repeated his words to Tosi.

"No, not so. If you would get her safely away you must wait and do as I say. Ride to-night in the direction of that high mountain, which you saw before you on the right when the sun was shining; ride at a walk, and when morning is beginning to dawn, look about you for a low hill, which has three

\* = young lady.

big trees on the top. If you go straight, you should reach it about an hour after the sun has risen. Wait at the foot of that hill for me until to-morrow night; then I will tell you what to do."

Ivor turned to translate this to Harold, and when he looked up again, Tosi had vanished.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A STRANGE AWAKENING

"**N**OW, Harold," said Ivor, "in order to follow Tosi's instructions to the letter, we will have to leave this spot at about twelve o'clock. It is now eight, so that we had better get what sleep we can before then, for there may be little or no rest for us to-morrow."

"Yes," answered Morton; "for the horses are rather fagged after the long day's journey, and we must save them as much as possible for whatever work may be in store for them to-morrow or the day after."

As they spoke they dismounted, and were unsaddling and putting things right for the few hours' rest which they contemplated taking.

"By the way, Ivor, what is the date to-day?"

"The 26th of October."

"Oh! Is that so? Well, let me see what time we have got before the moon is full." Morton struck a match and pulled out his pocket-calendar. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed excitedly: "we have not over-much time to lose. I see the moon will be full on the 28th."

"Come, old fellow," said Risk, "try to keep calm about this. You must not allow yourself to be upset. You will require all your nerves for what lies before us, and you must do what you can to forget things for the present, while we do our utmost to prevent the event threatened in the future. Now let us try to get to sleep."

They lay down, and though the air was cold, and the repast they had made very frugal, they were wearied out and soon fell off to sleep. They had made a small fire under the bushes, for Tosi had assured them that none of the natives were near, and the fire would not be seen from a distance, owing to the bushes which grew thickly around the spot where they lay.

Morton slept soundly, but his sleep was a very troubled one, and he moved frequently. In his dreams he saw Miss Delton lying in a Kafir hut. It was night, and yet he could see her beautiful face, with wide-open blue eyes as she gazed into the darkness; and as he looked it seemed to him that she smiled sweetly at him, and opened her mouth to speak. He tried to catch what she said, but could not. Then the dream changed, and he saw her again charging on horseback through a maddened, surging sea of blacks. She was seated calmly upon a snow-white horse, which, as it rushed, overthrew whatever came in its way. The rider sat with a calm, unperturbed face while assegais flew harmlessly all around her, and knobkerries, hurled at her, passed close to her. Then the dream changed again, and this time it appeared that he was alone in a cold dark church, and as he walked he heard a voice, *her voice*, calling to him from far away. The words he could not hear, but the voice was hers, and she was in danger, for the fear in her voice told him that. In his dream it appeared that he could hear the dull tread as of a footstep creeping nearer and nearer to where he stood; and then again he heard the voice, and this time the words were audible, for they were spoken in a whisper in his ear. It said, "Come to me, rise and come"; and Morton awoke. But as if his dream were being continued, he still heard sounds in his ear and felt hot breath on his face.

For a moment he lay perfectly still, until he felt sure that he was awake and not dreaming. Then, as the sound continued, he wondered what the meaning of it could

be. It could not be a Kafir—of that he felt sure ; but it might be a lion, for there were still some about, and if so, his wisest plan would be to lie perfectly still, until he could determine what course to take. Then he opened one eye slightly, and in the darkness he saw the form of his horse standing over him. He sat up on the ground for a moment, and patted the cold nose of the animal. Then suddenly he stopped, and sat as if listening. Yes ; he was sure he heard a sound—a very faint one, but still a sound, which was, if nothing else, rather suspicious.

Putting out his hand, he shook Risk gently, and then whispered to him, "Get up quickly and saddle your horse."

Both rose instantly, and put the saddles on their horses, and then quietly led them away from the spot.

The fire had gone out during their sleep, and the glowing embers alone remained.

Stepping quietly and slowly, they led their horses away for about fifty yards, and then, concealing themselves behind a bush, they stopped to tighten their girths, and as they did so they looked back to their late camp. Just then the burning embers suddenly shot into flame, and by the light they were horror-stricken to see, creeping round each side of the bush under which they had lain, several naked forms, with assegais in hand.

"Auw !" cried these, as they sprang to their feet on seeing that their quarry had flown.

"I told you so," said one. "You would speak, and they have heard us."

"*You* spoke," said another, and then the clamour became general ; each one accusing a different one of their number for having made the noise which had disturbed their would-be prey.

"Well, Risk, while this noise is going on we had better get away, for it won't be long before they will think of following us."

So quietly they rode out of the bush and crossed



“Just then the burning embers suddenly shot into flame, and by the light they were horror-stricken to see, creeping round each side of the bush under which they had lain, several naked forms, with assegais in hand.”

[To face p. 68.



the river, and as they reached the bush on the opposite bank they listened for a moment.

In the still night, the voices, and even at times the words, came clearly to them, and Risk translated the scraps of conversation as he heard them,

"How did you know they were here?" asked one.

"I saw two horses' spoors this morning, and they had worn shoes, so I knew the riders were whites."

Then another long conversation, the words of which were inaudible, went on for a while, and then some one asked: "Where are they from, and where do they go? Do they not know that there is war?"

Some more desultory conversation went on, only here and there a word being uttered loud enough to be heard. Frequent mention was made of "Itsobi," "guns," and other things; but the boys were relieved to note that no mention was made of Miss Delton, and by this they gathered that these men knew nothing of her capture, otherwise they would have guessed what they were after, and would have hastened on to warn the chief or headman, whose prize she was meant to be, that the two travellers were about to attempt her release. As it was, they appeared to think that they were merely two people trying to escape from the country, and as they were making no immediate attempt to follow them—perhaps because they realised that this would be futile, seeing that the two were mounted, whereas they were on foot—both Ivor and Harold felt much relieved; for they believed that these men would either return whence they came, or perhaps they would continue on their journey, wherever they were going to—possibly to join an impi.\*

After listening a little while longer, the boys continued their journey, going at a walk, as directed by Tosi.

On the way Morton related to Ivor the strange dreams he had had, and the strange awakening, and together they discussed their narrow escape. Many would say that the horse had merely sniffed

\* Impi=a native regiment,

at Morton's sleeping form as it came across him, while hobbling about ; but there are also many who would not ascribe this to a mere coincidence, but would realise to the full that the animal, however unknowingly, carried a message of warning to its master from that Supreme Power who, while guiding the destinies of the entire universe, created and ruled by Him, is not oblivious to the dangers and ills which beset the very meanest of those whom He has placed in this world. Risk and Morton realised this, and true thankfulness was not wanting in their hearts.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ABDUCTION

AND now let us leave Morton and Risk, as they are slowly wending their way across the wild veldt, while we follow Dorothy Delton from the time she was taken from the house of her friends.

Mrs. Warren and Dorothy had betaken themselves to bed, while Mr. Warren went on his nightly round to see that all was as it should be at the fort and at the different places where the sentries had been posted.

Dorothy sat down on the chair beside her bed, and for a time was lost in thought; then she arose, and lay down on the bed. For an hour or more after extinguishing her light she lay awake, thinking of things that had occurred and listening to the different movements in the house. She heard Mr. Warren's step as he returned from his inspection; then gradually all the sounds in the house ceased, and soon the whole household but she was wrapped in slumber. Tired out, she, without meaning to do so, being still dressed and unprepared for bed, dozed off.

How long she slept she never knew, but suddenly she was awakened by a strange feeling of unrest. "What could it be?" she wondered. She had not been troubled with dreams. She turned round and tried to compose herself, but her efforts were unavailing, for her heart beat wildly. Would she strike a match and light the candle? No; that would hardly do. It was foolish

of her, she knew, to feel so perturbed, and she would not encourage the feeling; she *would* sleep.

The wind slightly rattled the windows, and she shivered with nervousness.

"How foolish of me," she thought. "What a coward I am!" Yet the feeling was there, and do what she would she could not dispel it; and what was worse, it seemed to be growing more intense.

Then she heard a sound, as if a horse had begun to neigh, somewhere outside, and as if the sound had been suddenly stifled. What could that mean? There were no horses near: they had all been taken to a stable near the fort, so as to be at hand should they be needed. Then she turned again on her side and closed her eyes, determined to conquer her fears.

Suddenly a greater fear seized her, and she felt as if every hair on her head was standing on end. That terrible consciousness, which required neither sight nor sound to verify, that some unseen presence was in the room, seized her, and she started up, every nerve quivering in her body; but before she could utter the shriek which was already on her lips, a hand was pressed tightly on her mouth, and in her terror she fainted completely away.

When she recovered consciousness she found herself reclining in the arms of a big, half-naked Kafir, upon a horse which was galloping hard. Accompanying them were seven or eight other mounted blacks, and, judging from the way in which the horses were blowing, it was very evident that they had been going at this pace for some distance.

Dorothy stirred in her captor's arms, and he looked down at her. Her terror had left her, and, though naturally frightened and horrified by the thought of her position, she felt calm, and was able to restrain herself from showing emotion.

"So the Kafirs are fighting against women?" she said to her captor in Kafir, which she understood and spoke.

"Yes; we take what the white men prize most. That will make them leave the security of their burrows, and when they do that, we will eat them up. Now let them follow to save you, if they are the brave men they think they are. We went in amongst them and took you from their midst. Let them now take you from amongst us."

Like a flash the thought occurred to Dorothy as to who would follow after her, and bring her back or die in the attempt, and the thought was not a consoling one; for how could he, even if accompanied by the whole of Itsobi garrison, recapture her from amongst the well-armed thousands to whom she instinctively knew she was being carried? But the garrison could not leave Itsobi, for there were women and children there who needed protection; and she knew that, even if he had to come quite alone, come he would to her rescue, and then his life would be sacrificed. For how could she expect that he could come safely to her assistance through that country, teeming as it was with its bloodthirsty thousands? She shivered with fear, and she could but ill suppress the sobs which rose unbidden.

For herself she feared nothing; but the thought that he whom she loved so dearly was in danger proved almost too much for her.

"Why don't you kill me, and leave me here on the way?" she asked; and then she added in a tone of bitter and withering sarcasm, which was apparently lost on her auditor, "You would, I suppose, did you not fear that the few men from Itsobi would tear your cowardly eyes from your head as a punishment."

"Lie still, young woman; do not waste breath. We do not fear your white men. Before many suns have crossed our skies they will all lie whitening on the ground, or be driven into the big sea which brought them here, and then Kafirland will again have as its rulers the children of the people who were here since the first days, when the sun and the moon began to

move and the stars to grow. If we kill you and leave you here, your white men who will follow to find you will see that you are dead, and they will turn back. We want them to come on after you ; then will we kill them like dogs, and throw their bodies to our dogs. Besides, you are beautiful to look upon, White Flower, and our chief, Moseti, the friend of Kreli, wants wives." Then, noting her shudder, he continued, " Ah, White Flower, to be picked and left to wither and die on the ground you mind not ; but to be planted in honour in the kraal of Moseti you like not."

Dorothy answered nothing ; she saw that all argument was wasted. She hoped for no pity, and therefore kept quiet ; but the thought of her being made the wife of one of these men terrified her. Would to God that they would kill her, put her to the most fearful torture, if they wished ; but to destine her for so loathsome a purpose was worse than the most terrible death. It was too awful for thought, and she felt dazed.

The horses had long since been pulled up from the gallop, and had been proceeding at a walk for an hour or more ; and now, just as the sky in the east began to lighten, they were pulled up and the riders dismounted.

The men wandered about picking up dry bushes for a fire, and busying themselves with different things. A thought struck Dorothy, and, watching her opportunity, she wrote a few words hastily on a piece of paper, which she had torn from her pocket-book, and stuck it on a bush near her. Then she composed herself as best she could, and sat down beside the fire to get warm, for the morning was cold.

The rest was only for an hour or so, and then the party, remounting, proceeded on their journey again.

## CHAPTER XV

### MOSETI'S MOUNTAIN KRAAL

AFTER two days' travelling in this way, the Kafirs evidently recognising that they were too far away from Itsobi for Dorothy to escape, accommodated her with a horse to herself, and although she was still carefully guarded, having a Kafir mounted on each side of her, yet she was very much more comfortable than travelling as she had been doing in the arms of a none-too-sweet-smelling black. True, having no side-saddle was a decided inconvenience ; yet, being a skilful horsewoman, this was a trifle of small moment, compared with the mode of travelling in the earlier part of the journey. Besides which, although overwhelmed with the thought of the trials which would be awaiting her at their destination, and numbed by those events through which she had passed, Dorothy still possessed sufficient spirit to take interest in the present ; and, being mounted on a horse by herself, she was better able to see things as she travelled along.

The Kafir who had had her in his arms on the night of her capture, and whom she had snubbed so severely, did not trouble her with any further attentions, for which she was not sorry ; and the others addressed but few words to her, though they kept up an incessant chatter amongst themselves.

They had dismounted on many occasions during the time they had been on the road, and though the food which they prepared and ate at their halts was rather coarse, being for the most part broth of a kind and

grilled meat, Dorothy was not fastidious, and ate what was given her, if not with relish, at any rate with thankfulness. No event occurred to cause any excitement during the ride, and the country appeared so deserted that it was hard for Dorothy to imagine that it was in a state of war.

Sometimes they passed through country which was thickly dotted with huts; but at times hours passed without a single appearance of a human habitation. The natives, however, seemed to have deserted their homes, for few huts appeared to be occupied at all, and then only by old men, women, and children. Of cattle there were none, for these had evidently been driven off by the men to feed the army, or perhaps in order to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy. Thus they travelled for another day and night, never resting for more than four or five hours.

Dorothy noticed, when the day dawned, that the country through which they were now travelling was different to that through which they had gone up to then. The undulating veldt, with its low-lying hills and valleys, had given place to high mountains, with precipitous sides; dense bush grew in the deep gorges which ran down the sides of the mountains, while the country between was also thickly wooded. The little party were following along a narrow track, which was covered with loose stones which at some previous time must have come clattering down from the neighbouring heights. Numerous troops of baboons appeared, and went chattering away as soon as the party approached.

From the conversation of the men Dorothy learned that they were now approaching Moseti's kraal, and would be there some time during the afternoon, and with the knowledge that what she most dreaded was so near at hand her fears increased; but, brave girl that she was, she realised that this was not the time to give way, and she determined to keep a brave face and heart as long as she could. She would still hope for delivery,

and when the time came, if come it did, she would be ready if necessary to assist her rescuers by being prepared to take advantage of whatever opportunity might occur.

Suddenly a halt was called, and the man who had taken her from the magistrate's house, and who appeared to be the leader of the party, came forward to her.

"You must now follow me," he said, and not deigning to answer him a word, she turned her horse after him and followed. They left the path by which they had been travelling and made their way through the bush. It was hard work, and the branches of the trees through which they passed scratched Dorothy's face and caught in her hair, causing her severe pain; however, in less than twenty minutes they got almost clear of the bush, and Dorothy saw that they were at the foot of a very high mountain, which to her appeared inaccessible. Her guide drew rein, and then, putting his fingers to his lips, he gave a loud shrill whistle, which echoed in the mountains around. Then he dismounted and stood silently waiting for a reply, which soon came from the heights far up the mountain under which they stood.

"Who calls below?" asked the voice.

"It is I, Nonga, the messenger whom Moseti sent to do his bidding."

"That is well; and hast thou done what was given to thee to do?"

"Ay; and I bring now to Moseti what he most desired—a white woman, fair as the fairest flower; whose eyes are as the sky on a summer's day, and whose hair is as the gold of the sunset. Moreover, she is the daughter of Warren the magistrate, him whom Moseti hates."

"Thou hast done well, O Nonga, messenger of Moseti, so enter now with her whom thou hast brought."

There was silence for a moment, and then a sound which seemed to come from inside the mountain near

to where they stood reached Dorothy's ear. It was as the sound of many feet walking in measured treads.

Nearer and nearer the footsteps came, until they seemed right on them. Then they ceased for a moment, while a grating noise was heard as if coming from behind a gigantic slab of rock which lay in front of them, buried in the mountain.

Suddenly this rock moved slightly; then again it moved, and then it seemed to disappear altogether into the mountain, while in its place there was a large black hole, sufficiently large for both riders to enter.

"Follow me," said Nonga; but Dorothy almost involuntarily drew her horse back.

Before she had time to recover herself, and to realise how hopeless any sort of resistance would be, a dozen half-naked men rushed out of the cave and drew horse and rider in. Then, looking back, Dorothy saw that numbers of blacks were again fitting the stone into its position.

They were now in absolute darkness, and while Dorothy was still wondering what was expected of her, she heard Nonga's horse move off, the sound of its unshod feet echoing loudly, by which she knew that the chamber they were in was a lofty one. Almost simultaneously with the sound of Nonga's horse walking off, Dorothy felt her horse being taken by some one and led on, while some one else took her by the arm, possibly fearing that she might slip off her horse unseen and unheard in the darkness. Thus they proceeded at a slow pace for fifteen minutes or more. All the while Dorothy felt, by the motion of her horse, that they were proceeding up a gradual incline.

Then they stopped for a moment, and some of the men lighted torches, by the light of which she saw that they were in the depths of an immense cavern. The pathway along which they had come dipped down until it lost itself in the uttermost blackness below. In front of where they now halted, and distant about twenty paces was the wall of the cavern.

Vast stalagmites rose from the floor until they almost met the long stalactites which hung from the roof above. The lights of the torches flashed brightly amongst these, and as their rays were caught and reflected from one to the other, it appeared as if thousands of lights had been lit in the gigantic hall. It seemed as if the whole interior of the cavern was filled with a vast forest of these crystal columns, save only in the pathway up which they had come.

The sound of water dropping from the roof, and trickling in little streams along the floor, fell upon the ear, and as they proceeded the atmosphere became oppressive and moist.

For a few moments they halted in order to allow the puffing horses to recover their wind, and then, following one of the men with a torch in his hand, they turned to the left through a narrow path amongst the gigantic pillars.

The incline grew steeper as they proceeded, and the travellers had to guide their horses skilfully away from the calcareous formations on the floor, at the same time eluding the many overhead beams of stalactite and rock which threatened to strike their heads as they passed. The air was now growing more and more rare, and Dorothy found it difficult to breathe. They had been travelling so long, and always in an upward direction, that she felt sure they must now be near the top of the mountain. They appeared to be travelling up along the inside of the mountain, and must now be very many hundred feet above the spot from where they had first entered into the cave. Dorothy wondered how it was that she and Nonga had been kept waiting for so short a time for the stone to be moved away, after the voice high on the mountain had bidden them enter. Surely the men who had opened the door for them could not have done the journey to the door from the summit in so short a time, seeing that the journey up had taken so long. She looked about her, and found that only a dozen

or so were with them, whereas the stone at the entrance had been moved away by scores. By this she decided that a large number evidently remained below, near the door always, to move the stone or guard the entrance as directed by the voice on the mountain, which was evidently the voice of the signalman, and she further reasoned that this signalman must have some means of communicating his orders speedily to those below.

On they now went through the labyrinth of pillars. Now for ten or twenty yards the way would be free from impediments; presently they would come to within a yard of the wall; then the path would lead them away from it for a moment or two, only to bring them almost within touch of it again at the next turn. Now her horse would stumble against a stone, or one of those peculiar crystal growths; then a native would be heard to curse aloud as his head came in contact with an overhead substance: and so they proceeded, ever onward and upward.

Suddenly the passage was blocked by a gigantic boulder. They appeared to have taken a turn which brought them directly on to the face of the wall, and all dismounted. A dark narrow aperture like the hole of a porcupine appeared just under this rock, and Nonga, after handing his horse to one of the men, signalled to Dorothy to follow him, and going upon hands and knees he entered the hole. As she entered behind him she saw four or five of the men following her, while the remainder, having taken charge of the horses, were leading them down along the way whence they had come.

Feeling her way carefully, mindful lest she might strike her face against the sharp edges of rock through which she passed, Dorothy crept on in silence for some time, wondering as she went where she was being taken to. She had abandoned all hope of delivery now, for how would any one ever learn her whereabouts? And how, even did they trace her to where they

had entered the mountain, could they ever follow her, unguided, into these inmost recesses of the earth? Her heart was heavy, and her body sore after her long and tiring exertions.

Just as she was feeling that she could get no farther and must give up, her limbs being cramped and her knees and hands raw and bruised with this creeping, she became conscious that she had less difficulty in breathing, and she determined to continue still for a while. They had crept forward and upward, now turning to the right, then to the left, times innumerable; and now, as they proceeded, despite the fact that Nonga's body almost blocked the passage, the air was becoming decidedly fresher at every separate forward step. Then, far away between Nonga's back and the roof, Dorothy saw a small white light, and she saw by the increasing light that the remainder of the passage was perfectly straight, and ended in the open air.

At length the aperture was reached, and Dorothy, following Nonga, stepped forth once more into the daylight. She was for a moment dazzled and felt dizzy; but when she had recovered herself somewhat she found that, though still some distance from the summit of the mountain, they were many hundreds of feet above the valleys below. The side upon which they stood went almost perpendicularly down, and she saw that from that side at least there could be no hope of rescue; for who could climb a straight, steep face like that? The other side—the side which overlooked the way she and her captors had come, and which was above the door was, she knew, equally steep and inaccessible.

A few moments' rest, and then, at a signal from Nonga, on they went. The path now lay before them along the outside of the mountain, like a spiral stairway. When two or three turns had been made they reached the side of the mountain under which the door was situated, and as she looked from the dizzy heights

Dorothy easily recognised the country below, through which she and her escort had ridden.

A few feet away from the pathway along which they were walking, on a platform of rock overlooking the vast expanse of country, stood a Kafir. He scarcely looked up as the party approached, so intent was he upon something he appeared to be watching down below. As they reached the spot upon which he was standing, Dorothy stepped aside from the path on to the platform, and followed with her eyes the direction he was looking,

Nonga scowled furiously at her and putting out his hand he gripped her arm, and drew her again into the pathway beside him; but she had already seen what she desired. Far down the mountain, standing on a narrow ledge which she wondered how he had ever reached, stood another naked form; some hundreds of feet below him stood another; and though she had not had time to look, she knew that there were others all the way down at intervals, until the signalman to whom Nonga had spoken terminated the line of communication. From the base, where she and Nonga had stood before entering the mountain, to where the signalman was standing she judged must be inaccessible; but as they had only heard the voice and had not seen the figure, she could not tell with accuracy that this was so. The last man could communicate with the interior of the cave by some means or another, she felt convinced; but how, she knew not. Still pondering the matter in her mind, it suddenly occurred to her that some path must exist down this steep side, or else how could the men whom she had seen, and the others whom she knew were lower down, ever reach their posts; and the thought brought her that same hope which is in the heart of the drowning man, who clutches madly at straws, feathers, and such like to save himself from death.

Could she not, if she could but escape the vigilance of her captors, make her way down along the path? But how pass these sentries? how find that path? and

how, having found it, and having safely passed those watchers, could she hope to descend that last inaccessible portion? The Kafirs evidently knew no way, and how could she? But her thoughts were suddenly brought back from wild possibilities of the future to the very real present. The party had arrived at a narrow passage between two rocks, and passing through this, they found themselves in a basin-like formation on the top of the mountain.

The area of the basin was not more than about three acres in extent; but into this small space were crowded at least a hundred Kafir huts. Four of these, somewhat larger than the others, were placed in the centre of a large circle, round which was a high palisade formed of upright stakes driven into the ground. Round this circle were the other huts, while again round these lay the wall or sides of the basin.

Nonga directed the other men to leave him here, and he and Dorothy proceeded to one of the large huts in the centre of the circle, where he delivered her up to a native woman, who was sitting outside pounding away at some Kafir corn in a large wooden bowl.

## CHAPTER XVI

### MOSETI'S BIDDING

HAVING handed Dorothy over in this way, Nonga entered another hut of the centre group, and Dorothy walked forward to the woman and held out her hand; for something in the face of the other told her that here she would at any rate receive kindness.

The woman took her hand and then led her into the hut, where she motioned her to a seat while she busied herself preparing food.

Dorothy was worn out with fatigue; but she ate heartily—nay, almost greedily—at what was placed before her, while her companion looked upon her with a look of sincerest sympathy.

“My heart is with thee, O white lady,” said she at length, when Dorothy had satisfied the first cravings of hunger; “for I too am here, a captive, like unto thee.”

Dorothy put out her hand and touched that of her companion.

“So, my friend,” she answered, “and how comes it that thou, a woman of the same race as these people, dost call thyself a captive when amongst thine own?”

“Oh!” she replied. “I am truly of these people, still, what I have said is truth. I, Kakani, the daughter of Telena, a man rich in goods and cattle, was sought in marriage by one Tosi. He too had cattle; but

another, a great captain in the army of the king, rich beyond knowledge and well in favour with the king, sought me too. My father would that I should have this man, Nonga by name—he who stole thee from thy father's house and brought thee hither. Tosi I loved, and he loved me far beyond the love of men of his race. Tosi I trust; but Nonga I hate and abhor. Nonga, whose very name is black with the deeds he has committed, whose approach is enough to make little children run and hide behind their mothers, and whose look makes the boldest heart to tremble, to him was I given. But before he could take me I escaped from my home, and, guided by Tosi, I travelled through the regions through which you came and sought an audience with Moseti, who is the king's greatest captain.

"I laid my case before him, and he listened for a while with patience; but when I told him that I had been given to Nonga by my father, he grew angry, and turned upon me with a scowl.

"‘Knowest thou not,’ he asked, ‘that thou art the property of thy father, and by the laws he can give thee to whomsoever he wills? How daredst thou then to break from him to whom thy father had given thee?’

"For a moment there was silence while I thought what reply I should give; but before I had framed speech wherewith to reply, Tosi, who had been standing quietly near, stepped forward and answered for me, thus:

"‘True is it, O Great One; true are the words which thou hast spoken. The laws have rightly decreed that the right is the father's to give the hand of his daughter to whomsoever it pleaseth him to give it; but there is a right before which other rights are as nothing, and that right is thine, O Great One. We acknowledge thine as being above the rights of fathers or aught else, and to the Father of Fathers are we come to hear thy word and to plead for what we desire. Moreover, O Great o the Great, I, Tosi,

would beseech thee to hearken further to me, whilst I ask thee to grant me, in thy great goodness, this one favour that I would ask of thee. Give her unto me and I will serve thee all my days.'

"He stopped for a moment, and falling down low he raised his arms, and continued at first in a subdued voice, raising it and lowering it to suit the words he uttered.

"'O Great One, the land is darkening; thick black storm clouds rise behind the mountains and are slowly but surely growing greater as they come nearer. The distant rumblings of thunder are heard, with ever and anon a flash of fire in them to show the fierce destruction which they carry in their blackness. The storm comes, and thou, O Great Moseti, first chief in the land, next to our Great Father, will need the arms of thy warriors, and not one from all thy hosts canst thou spare. Ay, thou mayest say that thou hast many who will stand by thee in the hour of storm; but there is not in all thy thousands one who will be as true to thee and to our Great Father, Kreli; none who will stand nearer thee in the hour of danger than I, Tosi, the son of Anela. Give her to me, O Great Chief; Leader of all People, Dweller in Highest Parts of the Earth, and I will be thy slave when all who now serve thee have fled. In victory I will extol thee, and if defeat or disaster be thy lot, still will I stand beside thee—yea, even should death overtake thee, then shall that death be wrought over my body.'

"I saw that Tosi's speech pleased Moseti, and I looked eagerly at him, for his lips had already moved to utter the words, Take her and go in peace, when there was a loud uproar, and Nonga, followed by a number of his warriors, entered the kraal and presented himself at the feet of the chief.

"There was silence for a while, and then Moseti spoke.

"'Rise, Nonga,' he said. 'Tell thy tale, whilst yet

the words of this woman and of Tosi are fresh in my ears.'

"Then rose Nonga, and addressing the chief, he told him how I had been given to him by my father, according to the laws of the king; further, how I had escaped from him and fled to Moseti.

"The chief listened and looked grave. Tosi's speech had pleased him, and he would fain have given me to him; but Nonga was high in the king's favour, and he would not give him offence, for he knew that Nonga's influence amongst the people was great, for he was a great warrior, and further, they feared him greatly. He hesitated for a moment; then he turned to Nonga and spoke these words:

"'Thou art my right hand, a great captain amongst the king's warriors, and thou, Nonga, hast served the king and me with zeal and integrity all thy days. This woman is, as thou hast said, thine by the laws made by those who were great when we were still wandering among the stars; and to thee doth she rightly belong.' He paused a moment, and during that time I trembled, for I dreaded what might fall from his lips next; then he continued, 'Here stands one,' indicating Tosi, 'who acknowledges thy right, but he pleads, that while the father has the right of the giving of his daughter's hand to whom he wills, the chief has a right beyond that. To give her to both I cannot. She has sought protection from me, therefore I must give it to her. I will therefore set thee a task, and to thee, Tosi, will I set another. Then to him who carries out my commands first will I give the hand of Kakani.'

"Here Nonga rose, as if to speak; but Moseti motioned him to be silent. Then he continued:

"The place Itsobi lies beyond those distant hills, and I would have you go there now. There dwells Warren, the magistrate, who gave the warning to the people in the Colony to send their soldiers to destroy us. We caught the messenger, and his body now hangs rotting on the tree to which our warriors tied him.

Now would I have Warren likewise; but he remains behind his stronghold. Seize one of his women-kind, his wife or his daughter, and bring her here. Then will Warren follow; and then shall I have him to die before me, while the children of Kreli laugh at his death. Go, Nonga; bring her to me, and when the moon is full in the skies I will take her to wife, for I love the fair faces of the white women; and when I take her, then shall I give Kakani unto thee.'

"Then, turning to Tosi, he gave him this command. 'Go thou, Tosi, down through the great cavern, into the plain below, and then alone and unaided find thy way back to this from beyond the mountain, by the path now long forgotten, and which is known only to the spirits of the Great Departed Ones. If thou art here, when the moon shows its face full, and Nonga has not yet returned, then shall Kakani be thine. But if Nonga shall have returned and have done my bidding before thee, then shall she be his.'"

Here Kakani stopped and wept bitterly, for she realised all too fully that Nonga had won and she was his prize. It was now Dorothy's turn to comfort her, and she did so by telling her own history.

"Be not disheartened, my friend," she said to the weeping girl. "Our fates are hard, but we may still have freedom; and then we will be joined by our lovers and will flee from Kafirland." She then explained that she was not Mr. Warren's daughter, as had been supposed by Nonga owing to the fact that she was in his house.

Then, tired and weary, Dorothy lay down and fell asleep, while Kakani walked towards her own hut some yards away.

Dorothy was awakened from her sleep by hearing some one talking in a low voice next to her hut. How long she had been asleep she knew not; but she felt that it must be long past midnight.

"So thou hast brought her, Nonga," said a voice, deep and gruff; and she heard another voice, which she

recognised as being Nonga's, answer: "Yes; I have done thy commands and herein doth she lie. Now claim I the reward which thou promised, O Great One."

"Thou speakest too soon," came the first voice again. "Did I not say that she would be yours when the moon first showed her face full in the skies, when I also would take to wife her whom thou hast brought?"

"Yea, O chief, those were thy words; but the full moon will show forth on the evening of to-morrow; but one day removed from this. May I therefore not take her to me now? Then canst thou too take her who sleeps in this."

Dorothy trembled.

Would Moseti consent? she asked herself, and would she so soon meet the horror which she dreaded?

Could she but find a knife or a weapon of any sort, how soon would she not be out of reach of this terrible fate. The next words, however, reassured her.

"What I have said, Nonga, that have I said. To-morrow night will we take these women; but, for to-night, let them dream in peace of those whom they would themselves far rather be with."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HILL OF DEATH—SALMO

WHEN last we saw Ivor and Harold they were riding slowly on the way to where Tosi had directed them, and now we rejoin them as they continue their ride. The faint morning light is just beginning to steal across the eastern sky. The air is chilly, though not unpleasantly so; yet sufficiently sharp to create that exhilarating feeling which only those know who have taken an early morning ride. Tired they certainly are, for they have now been in the saddle for five consecutive hours, and the rest they had had previous to that had not been much.

The poor animals are, however, the worst off, for they are really fagged out.

"Well, we can't be very far from the little hill Tosi spoke about, Ivor," said Harold, after they had been riding in silence for a while.

"No, I think not. Tosi told us we could rest until twelve o'clock; but owing to those wretched Kafirs intruding, we left the camp quite half an hour before that. I looked at my watch just as we were moving off. I expect we will see the spot whenever it is light enough."

"I do wish the sun would hurry up," Harold grumbled impatiently. "It seems so long to wait before we can do anything, and what *are* we to do when we have come to the end of the journey?"

"You must be patient, old man," said Ivor, in a

sympathetic tone. "And above all, we must trust Tosi. I feel sure that he has some scheme in his mind, or he would never have sanctioned our coming on, but would have done all in his power to have persuaded us to return."

"Yes, I believe that; and I am more hopeful of success than I have ever been since we started from Itsobi. Still, when I think of my darling being at the mercy of those brutes, I feel unmanned for a moment. But come what will I shall rescue her, God helping me, and if I fail my life will pay the penalty; for if everything fails I will ride straight into Moseti's kraal and fight until I am killed."

He paused for a moment and then he continued: "But I pray, if we fail, that God will in His mercy allow her too to die; for there are things far, far worse than death, and——" Here Morton broke down completely, and, strong man though he was, his whole frame was convulsed with the sobs he fain would have suppressed.

"Come, my dear fellow," said Risk. "I cannot tell you how deeply I feel for you. But this is not the time for grieving; we must both keep our spirits as bright as possible, so as to be ready for whatever we may have to do. Ah! There's the sun at last; and I say, there's the little hill."

Morton looked up, and there indeed was the hill; there could be no mistaking it, for it completely fitted in with Tosi's description.

It lay some miles away from where they were, and somewhat to the left of the direction in which they were travelling. In appearance, it was nothing more than a very ordinary-looking conical-shaped hill, and was only about four hundred feet at most in height, from base to summit.

The hill was covered with the usual veldt bushes; but, at the very top, there were three large trees, which looked in the distance like sentries watching the country around.

Nearer and nearer the riders approached, and yet no sign of Tosi or any other human being was in sight. At last the hill was reached, and still no one appeared to be there to meet them.

"We should scarcely expect to find Tosi here now, Harold," Ivor said, after they had ridden round the base and had returned again to the point from which they had started. "He told us to wait here until he came, and it may be that he will not be here until late. He told us, you know, to wait until night for him."

"True!" Harold replied. "But what shall we do in the meantime? We can't climb to the top of the hill, for then we might possibly be seen; for the veldt is very bare here, and there are thousands of Kafirs about. Let us look for a donga or something, where we and the horses can be hidden from sight should any of the brutes pass anywhere near to this."

The sun was now high up; so, after searching for a suitable spot and finding one, the boys sat down and made a hearty meal of what provisions they had left. Then, having tied the horses to some roots of bushes in the bank of the donga to keep them from straying, they lay down, and despite the fact that it was early morning and the sun shining brightly, they slept soundly.

An hour passed, two hours, and still the wearied travellers slept on, oblivious to the present or the future. Could they but have been awake, they would have seen that which would have caused them some uneasiness; for while they slept, a figure of a naked Kafir appeared on the hill. He was armed with the usual kerrie and assegai, and accompanying him was another figure; but whether it belonged to a man or a monkey would have been a difficult problem to solve at the distance, had either or both boys been awake.

The warrior stood and looked round the country, then down the sides of the mountain for some time.

Then he motioned to his companion, and together they walked down the hillside; or rather, he walked, and his companion waddled and sprang along in turns. Another stoppage for a moment, and then his eyes appeared to meet with what he was looking for, and again they came on, this time making straight for the spot where the sleepers lay.

Tosi, for he it was whom we saw on the hill slopes, bent down and touched Risk gently on the shoulder, and then as gently shook Morton.

Together the boys sprang up, exclaiming almost simultaneously, as their eyes fell on the man before them, "Tosi!"

"Yes! It is I, Tosi," the warrior answered; and continued, "And this is Salmo, who will help you to find and restore her whom you follow."

Both boys turned to see the person indicated by Tosi, and, as their eyes fell upon the horrid, repulsive-looking creature before them, they both started with horror.

The creature was not more than about four feet high. Its body was thick-set and its arms were long and sinewy; the whole surmounted by a heavy head, the face of which was horribly wrinkled. Long white hair on the head and on parts of the body gave the figure a still more brutish appearance; while the thick nose and large mouth, with two large yellow teeth protruding, would have persuaded Darwin, could he have seen it, that here stood the long-sought-after missing link.

"Come, follow us now, Risk. Salmo will lead us to a place where you will see many strange things and learn much, which you knew not of before."

Harold and Ivor rose to follow, for Salmo was already on his way up the hill, springing a step or two, then crawling for a few yards on hands and knees; then, straightening himself, he would walk erect, and so on, just as it best suited him.

They hesitated for a moment, and Tosi, guessing the cause, assured them that the horses were perfectly safe.

"For," added he, "no human foot has been within a mile of this hill for many winters back. It is the Hill of Death, and truly is it so named, for no man who has climbed to the top has ever come back alive, save only one, and I am he. But fear not, death came only to those for whom it was meant, and you are safe, for you come by permission of Salmo, who granted it because he fain would help you to do what you desire. He knew that the fair one, the White Lily, was being taken from you, and he it is who will give her back to you. But come, I will tell you of all this when we are in Salmo's cave."

Harold and Ivor, without a word, followed; as, indeed, they would have done, even did they know that they were going into the very jaws of death, so long as they did so with the knowledge that they had an off-chance of achieving their object.

Up they went, while Salmo, who had already reached the summit, waited under the three trees there.

How like a hideous gorilla he looked against the skyline! And as they approached nearer to him the resemblance grew stronger. Naked, except for a string of beads, and with a monkey's skin as an apron, while round his neck he wore a necklace of human teeth. This completed his dress. A thin scraggy white beard fringed his repulsive-looking face, while the white hair on his head stood out like the bristles of a pig. During all this time not a word had he spoken, and now, as they advanced, he uttered hideous guttural sounds, and sprang about excitedly as they approached him.

The summit was at length reached, and for a moment they stood still in order to recover breath.

"See there," said Tosi, pointing across the flat, almost bare veldt, to a range of mountains which bounded the horizon. "Beyond those mountains lie the hosts of the king, and on that mountain," indicating one which stood out high above the others, "right on its

top, is the kraal of Moseti, Kreli's chief captain. The way to the top is through a great cave which lies within it. A secret way goes from the door in the side and leads up along the inside until it comes out near the top. There is no other way known. Many hundreds of moons ago another way was known, but only to a few. It was known to the king and to his great medicine men. Then the secret was lost, and though many kings have tried to learn it, none have succeeded."

"But how, then, will we ever reach her whom we seek?" asked Harold anxiously.

"There *is* a way, I have said," answered Tosi, "and Salmo knows that way. None know that he knows it, for all fear him, even the king and Moseti. For Salmo hates Moseti, and I alone of all the many in Kafirland speak to this one. None even know that he lives. They think him dead, and fear his spirit."

"Will he show us the way? Come, ask him," said Morton. Then, before Tosi could speak, he called to Salmo; but receiving no answer he caught him by the arm: "Salmo, say, show us the way!"

Salmo turned round and eyed Morton slowly from head to foot with a sullen, senseless look, like one who understood not what was said to him.

"Nay," said Tosi, "speak not to him, for his ears tell his brain but little, and his tongue tells others less, for he has not one. Therein lies his hate, for his tongue was torn from his mouth by order of Moseti, when once Salmo spoke to him of what would come to him if he continued on his wrong-doing. Salmo lived then on the mountain which you see, and was the chief man of medicine to the king, as he had been to his father, and to those who came before the king's father, for many a generation back. Moseti had long hated Salmo, for he was jealous of his power with the people; and not liking the prophecy, he had his tongue torn out, and then ordered the body, for Salmo was as one dead, to be thrown into the deep pit in the great cave,

"I stood in the dark, and when the men retreated hurriedly after doing the deed, I sprang in, and finding the body before it sank, I brought it to the bank. I too thought him dead, but wished to bury the body of him who had served the nation for so long. Scarce had I landed and pulled out the body, when it moved in my arms, restored to life by the cold water of the pit; and then, knowing that life was not yet gone, I rubbed the limbs until the blood ran freely through them again. Then Salmo rose, and taking me by the hand, led me through the cavern, and through the roof of the cave until we stood again on the top. Then, silently, we crept down the mountain by a path of which I had until then been ignorant. It was scarcely a path; still, it was a way. When half-way down Salmo stopped at a small rock, which seemed bedded in the mountain side above the narrow pathway on which we stood, and shaking it gently for a while, he loosened it from its hold, and displayed a hole, scarce big enough for the body of a man to get into. He signalled to me to creep in, and when I did so he followed me, and pulled the rock back into its place after him. Then we crept along a dark channel; on and on we crept, and I felt at last as if I had been creeping for days. We rested, and then travelled on and on again.

"Many times we halted to rest, for the passage seemed unending; but at last Salmo told me to rise, and I did so, and found that my head did not strike against anything, and I knew that we were in a cave. My limbs were cramped, after having gone on hands and knees for so long, and I could not stand. Then Salmo stepped over me, and for a while I was left alone. Presently he returned, and gave me a horn in which was water. Oh, how I drank! for my throat and tongue were parched. Then I lay down again for a while, after which I rose refreshed.

"After a short time Salmo struck a light, and I found we were in a cavern. But come, you will see for your-

selves, for we stand now upon the outer crust of that selfsame cave, and it is from here we will reach her whom you love."

Meanwhile Salmo was standing, unmoved, gazing with that vacant look which was always in his filmy eyes away across the broad veldt to the mountains.

Now, as Tosi touched him, he turned, and with a diabolical chuckle he spat violently three or four times in the direction of the mountains. Then, bending down, he lifted a stone which lay loosely on the ground and disclosed a small, square, black hole through which Tosi squeezed, and the boys followed. Salmo also followed, closing the hole above him as he did so. Then he struck a light, and by some means fixed another stone beneath it, so that, should any one by chance move the one on top, nothing would be seen but a stone below, and consequently the existence of the hole would never be suspected.

Morton and Risk, as they squeezed through the hole, were warned by Tosi not to move, and now by the light of the torch which Salmo lit, they saw that it was well that they had listened to the warning. For they found that they were standing upon a comparatively narrow ledge, almost in the roof of a gigantic cavern which lay deep and black underneath them.

From the ledge hung a ladder made of raw oxhide thongs. This went down and down until it was lost to sight in the blackness of space. Tosi now began climbing down, and after what must have been fully three minutes, he shouted out to Risk to follow, and to tell Morton to wait until he heard them shout from below, as the ropes were not strong enough for two.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SALMO'S CAVE

DOWN into the darkness stepped Harold, feeling carefully for each rung of the loose ladder, which, although fixed below, was still somewhat slack and swung with the weight of his body on it. Far above him, standing in the glare of the torch which he held in his hand, stood Salmo, waiting until the shaking of the ladder from below should give him the signal to make his descent.

At last Morton landed, and found himself standing once more on terra firma. Then some one shook the ladder, and Salmo above began to climb down, with the lighted torch still in his hand.

As the light neared the ground its rays lit up the dark space round about, revealing Tosi, Ivor, and Harold standing together at the foot of the ladder, with Salmo swinging in space a few yards above them in his downward course. The cavern was not very wide, but it was exceedingly high.

For a while the boys stood horrified at the fearful sights which met their gaze when the light showed them clearly what was in the cave. On one side of the wall hung weapons of all sorts, assegais, bows and arrows, knobkerries, a few guns, and so on. Strings of beads hung on other parts of the cave, and Kafir ornaments of various kinds. Then all over the walls at different places hung human skulls and bones, snake-skins and other gruesome ornaments, while standing on the

floors were jars of stone, iron pots, and so on. The stench was horrible.

In one side a deep hole entered the wall of rock, and from the furthest corner from where they were standing came a sound of water rushing. Tosi took the torch from Salmo's hand and led the boys over to the corner. Here they saw a hole, not more than three feet from the edge to the surface of the water, which rushed swiftly through it, and then fell as it passed underneath the opposite bank to some great distance beneath. They could hear the water as it fell far below where they were standing.

"Here," said Tosi, "does Salmo throw all those whom he hates. Many of my race have passed under that bank, and have been washed down to the innermost parts of the earth."

Then they returned again to where Salmo was standing, and Tosi lighted a fire for them, and prepared them some food, of which they stood greatly in need.

So absorbed were they in the preparation of their meal that for a time they lost all thought of Salmo, until Morton looked up to where he had been standing some time before, and was surprised to note that he was not there now.

"Where is Salmo?" he asked of Tosi, who however made no reply for a moment.

Then he stretched himself slowly, and made answer: "Salmo has gone to his place of thought, where great secrets are revealed to him by the spirits; even now is he seeing how to approach the kraal of Moseti. Come, we will follow him."

The meal being finished, Tosi rose, and closely followed by the boys, he entered the square hole in the rock which was mentioned before, and they found themselves again in darkness.

Then Tosi whispered to them to be careful how they trod, and they felt about with their feet and found that they were descending a stone stairway. Down

they went, step by step, hearing as they went a terrible loud roaring, as of an immense body of water falling from a great distance. So loud did the sound grow, that in a few moments it seemed as if the drums of their ears were paralysed.

Then they felt that they were once more on flat ground, and simultaneously a faint light broke on them and, looking up, they were conscious that they were in another lofty chamber, far below the one which they had just quitted, and much larger. The light was caused by a fire at the side of the cave farthest from them. A few yards from the fire fell the gigantic cascade from the roof of the cave. The water hissed and gurgled as it fell, and then disappeared again through a large fissure in the rocky side.

In front of the fire, and with his back to them, sat Salmo. He was sitting upon his haunches, looking intently at something before him, with his bony fingers thrust into his long white hair.

Tosi signalled to them to approach, and creeping up behind Salmo, they looked over his shoulder. Before him stood a large pot, in which was a thick black substance like tar. Not a movement did Salmo make to show that he had observed their presence, though so close did they stand to him, that at times their garments almost touched him. It seemed as if he were in a trance, so silently did he sit. Not a muscle moved in his whole body to betray the fact that life was still in it.

Five minutes passed, ten minutes, half an hour, and both Harold and Ivor were growing weary of standing. "What were they waiting for?" they asked themselves. But Tosi too seemed to have fallen into a state of coma, for he was gazing into the pot with almost the same intentness as did Salmo.

Suddenly the black substance in the pot moved slowly; then upon the surface appeared eddies, as made by a stone when thrown into still water. More

and more violently agitated did the stuff become, until in a few minutes it seemed as if some wriggling, writhing monster were in the mess. Then the struggling lessened, and gradually the motions became subdued, until the surface was as calm as it had been before.

Now a thin film seemed to cover the surface, and then, to the amazement of the boys, upon it there appeared the outlines as of a picture. More and more distinct did it become, and then they saw, before them in the pot, a face.

Morton and Risk started as the features grew more and more pronounced, for it was the face of Dorothy Delton, and it appeared not like a picture, but like the real face of flesh and blood. Then suddenly it disappeared, and the surface of the pot was again calm and smooth. Again the upheaval, and again the calm, and the film once more lay while a picture formed.

This time it was a large kraal, encircled by a rock-and-earth embankment. Between that circle and an inner ring, composed of wooden posts, were numbers of huts, and inside the wooden palisade were four huts, larger and more imposing-looking than the others. The doors of these faced the lookers-on, and inside one sat a young girl, whom both boys easily recognised as Dorothy. Next to her stood a tall, graceful-looking Kafir woman. This woman was weeping, and every now and again she would look about her as if she expected some one.

Then, again, this picture in turn disappeared, and after the surface had once more quieted, a more violent disturbance took place. This time the substance hissed and danced so violently that some of it splashed over the side of the pot. Again it quieted down, and then a picture showed itself which seemed to awaken Salmo, for he rose and danced round and round the pot, foaming at the mouth and gesticulating furiously.

The picture was the same almost as the last, but the figures were different. In it the boys saw three figures steal up to the huts, while a fourth crept along on hands

and knees beside them. This figure was that of Salmo, for it was unmistakable. Two of the figures belonged to white men, for they were clothed, and the boys recognised them as being themselves, though which was which neither could tell. The women saw them, and as they rushed forward to meet them, a herd of naked savages came into view; then a general *mêlée* followed, in which the figures became so mixed that nothing could be seen clearly. Then, without the usual subsiding of the liquid, the picture changed, and only three figures were revealed, hurrying on, two of which carried bundles in their arms.

Suddenly the picture vanished, and the liquid lay once more silent and black in the pot.

Then they noticed that Salmo had fallen to the ground, and was foaming horribly at the mouth. Raising him up, Tosi forced some black-looking stuff between his teeth. Then his writhing ceased, and for a long while he lay as one dead. After a time he stirred slightly, and Tosi administered another dose of the medicine; then he moved again, and after a few minutes he sat up. For a time he appeared bewildered and dazed, but gradually complete consciousness seemed to come back to him. Then he lay back and went off into a deep sleep.

Tosi signalled to the boys to follow Salmo's example, and being thoroughly exhausted, they lay down on the floor of the cavern; and despite the roar of the falling water as it dashed on the rocks, they soon were fast asleep, dreaming of the wonderful things which they had seen in Salmo's pot.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THROUGH THE SECRET PASSAGE

WHEN Harold awoke he was surprised to see that the fire was still burning, but this was explained when he found, on looking round, that Salmo was not in the place where he had lain when they went off to sleep. Presently he heard a slight noise behind him, and looking round, he perceived Salmo approaching from the direction of the stairway leading from the chamber above. In his arms he carried a bundle of wood, with which he now proceeded to rebuild the fire.

Harold looked at his watch and saw that it was six o'clock, and he knew, although the cave did not allow of the entrance of any light from the world outside, that it was morning. Then the thought brought another to him, and he realised that it was the morning of the twenty-eighth of the month, and on the night of that day was the time which had been fixed by Moseti for taking Dorothy to himself as his wife. The thought was a horrible one to Harold, and he ground his teeth together with rage and anguish. Would they ever be in time to save her? he asked himself; and then, as speedily, another question would come to him—if they were in time, how could they manage to take her away from among the hordes of Kafirs?

Thus question after question chased each other through his mind, until he felt as if he could not bear this forced idleness any longer; he must do some-

thing to quiet his thoughts or his mind would give way.

"Come, wake up, Ivor, old boy," he said at last, putting out his hand and shaking his friend gently. Then, as Ivor awoke and sat up, he continued: "For God's sake, let us get Tosi to start on the way through the tunnel; I can't stand this inactivity any longer."

Ivor arose and stretched himself deliberately for a few seconds; then he bent down and touched Tosi, who sprang up immediately.

Risk told him that he and Morton thought that they should be moving on now to Moseti's kraal, and he also told him that this was the day, the night of which was the time set by Moseti for taking Dorothy as his wife, and that they wished to be on the way at once.

Tosi listened quietly until Risk had finished speaking; then he answered: "From here to where the tunnel comes out of the mountain's side is long; but it will take us but a day to creep through on hands and knees. If we depart from here too soon, we shall have to lie at the mouth of the tunnel for a long time before the hour comes for us to rush in and carry off her whom you seek." He paused, as if making up his mind to say something else, and then continued: "I, too, go to take away one whom I love." Then he told them his own story, and how Kakani was also waiting to be liberated.

When he mentioned the name of Nonga both boys started, while Ivor exclaimed: "Surely that is not that man whose huts are on the hill opposite to Engwenza?"

"Yes; it is he," answered Tosi. "For years he has hated me, and has sought to do me what injury he could. He hates me, for the people hate him; while me they love. He loves not Kakani; but she is beautiful to look upon, and her father is rich in cattle, therefore he fain would take her as his wife.

"He thinks he has taken Warren's daughter, for so I

heard him say as he passed me on the road the day before yesterday. I laid myself behind a bush as I saw the party approach, and when I saw the young woman I recognised her, for she taught the children of Dale near to my kraal; then I knew that, though Nonga had carried off a woman from Warren's house, yet she was not his daughter, nor his wife, nor any kin of his as Moseti commanded. But that will matter little, for Moseti will think as Nonga does, that she is the daughter of Warren, and he will take her to wife. I could have been before Nonga, and could have climbed the mountain through the tunnel which I have told you of, but that would have profited me nothing; for Moseti fears Nonga, and, even had I done his command, he would not have allowed me to take Kakani, but would have kept us both until Nonga returned. Then would I have been slain on some excuse or another, and Kakani would have been given to Nonga. So I sought counsel of Salmo, and by signs he told me what to do. Then, while wandering about, I met the party, and knew that there would be those who would follow to rescue the Inkosazana, and I therefore went back the way whence they had come until I found you. Together will we now, guided and aided by Salmo, make our way to Moseti's kraal through the secret tunnel, and when we have taken those whom we love, Kakani and the fair white flower, from the hands of my people, who from henceforth are no more my people, then will we together fly out of the country."

During the conversation, and from the time when Harold had seen Salmo building up the fire, that person had been seated next to the fire busy with some little dry bones of sheep, which he kept throwing up in the air a few feet, and then, as they dropped, looking intently at them. Tosi and the boys had moved off to the far end of the corner when they started the conversation, for the roar of the water as it fell from the roof was so great that they could scarcely have heard each other speaking had they remained where they were. Now

as they watched Salmo they could see his lips move, but of course they could hear no sound.

Ivor explained to Harold that Salmo was going through a mystic process known as bone-throwing, by which Kafirs claim that they can tell the results of any escapade or undertaking upon which they are about to embark.

Salmo's movements were almost amusing to watch, and were it not that both boys felt too much upset with the seriousness of Dorothy's position, and anxiety as to how they would effect her release, or whether, indeed, they would accomplish it at all, they would have laughed most heartily at his strange antics. Now he rose from the kneeling posture in which he had been for some minutes, and, gathering the bones carefully together, he placed them in a crevice in the rock-wall. Then he turned and approached them, and, beckoning to Tosi, he ascended the steps. Tosi in turn signalled to the boys not to follow him.

After an absence of nearly fifteen minutes Tosi returned, looking, in the dim light of the fire, rather crestfallen.

For a moment he kept silence; then he spoke: "Four shall go forth from here into yonder tunnel," indicating a hole, or rather a deep rent, in the corner nearest to the waterfall, "and four will return."

"Does that mean that we shall be unsuccessful?" asked Harold.

"Nay, not so," replied Tosi. "It may mean that, and it may not; Salmo will not say. Perchance two of us shall fall in the fight, or perchance, as you say, we may fail. But it cannot mean that, for Tosi will die rather than return without Kakani, or without any who are his friends. Come, now, we must prepare to depart; Salmo is ready, and so is Tosi."

The preparations for departure were soon made, for they consisted merely in filling three large skins with water for themselves and those whom they were to rescue, and in seeing to their weapons.

Salmo carried nothing except a knobkerrie, about twenty-four inches long, with an exceptionally large head. Tosi had his great leather shield tied upon his back, so as to permit of his creeping through the tunnel; while in his hands he carried a bundle of assegais and a long hatchet. Ivor and Harold had their revolvers, and a plentiful supply of cartridges. They now loaded the six chambers of each revolver, and put the remainder of their cartridges where they could be most conveniently reached when required.

Everything being ready, Salmo placed an unlighted torch and a piece of flint stone near the mouth of the tunnel, so as to have it handy when the party returned; then, signalling to Tosi, he knelt down and crept into the narrow aperture, closely followed by Tosi and the boys.

Thus they went on for some minutes in silence. The air continued to be fresh, at which both boys wondered; but they soon discovered the reason for this, for once the darkness was dimly lighted up, and looking up, Harold and Ivor saw far above them a small round hole, and upon mentioning it to Tosi, he answered them that there were many such, which, however, were not noticeable from above, as they appeared to be porcupine holes, though in reality they had been made ages before by those who had made the tunnel, in order to admit the air.

After creeping on in this way for about half an hour, the boys felt their knees and the palms of their hands getting rather sore, so they stopped for a few minutes while they made pads for themselves with their handkerchiefs and two of the canvas bags which they had hung round them. Then on and on again.

When they had been creeping for fully three hours, during which they had frequently stopped for a few minutes at a time, Tosi called out to them to stop, and he told them that they were in a part where the tunnel had been heightened. This they did, and then Salmo struck a light on his flint stone and lit a torch.

By the light they saw that they were in an earthen cavern, with walls of dry clay, like the banks of a river. The roof was only about eight feet from the floor, and the chamber was scarcely large enough for a dozen people; still, it afforded standing room, and after the long creep it was a relief to be able to stretch once more.

Tosi told them that this chamber had not been made in the days when the tunnel was made. Indeed, he said that when he had first come along it there was no such place, and, in fact, the tunnel itself had been much narrower; but Salmo had been busy upon it for years, and had widened it considerably, and had made similar places to this all along the route. There were, he said, four places at equal intervals between Salmo's cave and where the tunnel came out on the mountain, and by this Harold and Ivor knew that they had only just completed a quarter of the distance. However, they were grateful for the rest which the little place afforded them, and upon consulting their watches they were relieved to find that it was only ten o'clock, and therefore they should arrive in ample time at their journey's end.

Salmo took, from a ledge cut into the dry clay wall, a little pot, which he handed to Tosi, who took some of the contents, which consisted of a thick brown paste, and applied it to the hands and knees of the boys, which, despite the pads, were bleeding profusely.

The paste gave almost instant relief, and effectually stopped the bleeding; then Salmo took from another ledge some strips of soft leather, which he had evidently also placed there at some past time in view of future contingencies, and handed them to the boys, who bound them round their bruised parts. Tosi did the same; but Salmo, whose hands and knees must have had a surface like horn, did not appear to require anything.

When the leather bands had been securely tied on,

the party once more continued their subterranean journey, stopping as before for a moment or two, and then on and on through the dark passage.

Thus they proceeded, until the second and third recesses were passed ; and now, sore and stiff in every limb, Harold and Ivor found themselves approaching, though still some distance from it, the last stop.

Oh, how long the last hour seemed ! At the third recess their watches had shown them that it was close upon five, and now they knew that another hour would bring them to the end of their long journey. Every stage had found their progress to have been a little slower than the one preceding it, and it seemed to them as if this last would never end.

After some more tedious creeping, the floor of the passage suddenly began to rise at an angle of about fifty-five degrees, thus making their progress still more tiring. Steeper and steeper it got, until at length Tosi called out to them to stop and draw breath ; then on and upward again for a few minutes longer ; another long, level, straight creep and then up again for another length of time, at the end of which Tosi told them in a subdued tone that they might now walk upright, as they had emerged from the tunnel into a cavern. Then they stopped, and Tosi warned them not to speak, for he told them that they were only a few feet away from the outside of the mountain, and should any one passing by hear the sound of voices, they would at once summon others and endeavour to ascertain from where it came.

A sudden light now appeared some yards from where they were standing, and they perceived that it proceeded from an inner and smaller chamber on the left of the one in which they stood, and leading out of it. It was Salmo, who had crept away to light a torch, and he now beckoned to them to enter.

Tosi showed them that there was no danger of the light from that inner chamber being seen from outside ; but he said it would be dangerous to have any light in

the one in which they were standing. They followed to where Salmo was, and, as there were still two or three hours' time before they could do anything, they lay down, and, tired out, stiff and sore, they were soon asleep.

## CHAPTER XX

### DOROTHY AND KAKANI—A PRESENTIMENT—SALMO AND THE SENTRY

MEANWHILE, how had things gone with Dorothy in her incarceration? We left her sitting in her hut, listening to the conversation between Moseti and Nonga, and great indeed was her relief at the reply which she heard Moseti give to Nonga's suggestion that they should take the two women that night, instead of leaving it to the night after. Yet the relief was, after all, but momentary; for the thought of how near she was now to her doom flashed through her mind as soon as the first feelings of relief were past.

The thought was too much for her; she had striven so hard to keep from showing her feelings in the presence of Nonga and the other men, that now her overwrought feelings gave way, and she wept long and bitterly. It seemed to her that everything had combined against her, for not only was she herself in danger of that which to her was infinitely worse than death, but also she knew that he whom she loved so dearly was in great danger; for he *would* attempt her rescue—of that she was as certain as she was that the earth was round. And how could he possibly accomplish it? How could he ascend that inaccessible mountain, even were he so fortunate as to reach it? Even now he was in danger, for he would assuredly have started after her as soon as he heard of her capture. Then back once more her thoughts would fly to her own horrible position. She to be the wife of a hideous

black man. Oh! it was *too* much. Surely God in His mercy would save her from that. And so thoughts continued to chase each other through her mind, while the hours dragged slowly on.

Suddenly she heard a soft footstep, and, terrified, she shuddered, for she felt fearful lest it might be the chief returning; but a voice at the entrance of the hut reassured her.

"It is I, Kakani, O white lady. The people rest, and I fain would speak with thee; for thy heart, like mine, is sore with grief and fear. Speak not loudly, for even now there are eyes watching this hut. I waited until he who watches had got beyond my hut; then silently I darted out."

"Is there no hope, Kakani? Must we, then, be given against our wishes and feelings to such as Moseti and Nonga?" asked Dorothy.

"I fear me," answered Kakani, "that the time for hope is past. Tosi must be dead, or perchance he failed to find the secret path. There is this hope though; take it," and she thrust a few dry things, which felt like roots of some kind, into Dorothy's hand. "When Moseti takes thee, and when all hope is past, eat of these, and I too will do so, for truly death is better for us than to be the wives of such as those."

Dorothy shuddered as her hands closed upon the roots, but when she looked up to reply she vaguely saw Kakani's figure vanish out of the door into the darkness outside.

Oh! Here, then, was hope after all. Death was terrible for one so young; still, gladly would she face even that—yes, a hundred thousand times rather than the dreadful alternative.

So she sat through the night, as hour after hour passed. Not a sound came from the silent kraal, which lay like a churchyard, with the huts as gigantic vaults, in that still African night. Thoughts of the past came up in rapid succession. Faces of those whom she loved seemed to peer out of the darkness at her. Surely

it could not be that she would never, *never* see those dear faces again in life.

At last the sky began to lighten, and the stars, which showed through the door of the hut, to fade away at the approach of the monarch of the skies. Then movements came from the outside kraal, as the women left their huts to fetch water and to light the fires. Now a child would cry a little distance off; then a cow would low impatiently as it heard its milker approaching. Presently the sounds became general, and the whole kraal was awake.

Food was brought to Dorothy, but, except taking a small draught of water, she tasted nothing, and sat like one turned to stone. Kakani came in, as the morning was wearing away, and tried to cheer her; but it was as if Dorothy heard her not, so silently she sat.

Towards noon a messenger brought word from his chief that Dorothy was to visit him, and at a word from Kakani she rose and accompanied her to Moseti's hut.

The chief was sitting at the door, while next to him stood his shield-bearer, and at his right hand was Nonga, who gave a look of malicious pleasure at seeing Dorothy's emaciated appearance.

Moseti motioned to Dorothy to sit down upon the mat beside him; but she appeared not to see what he wanted, and stood before him, with Kakani at her side.

"What is it that the chief desires of me?" she asked him, quietly enough.

"I sent for thee, O most beautiful of white flowers," he answered, "that I might see for myself thy beauty, which others speak of. Thy beauty is indeed great—so great that beside thee the very stars lose their glory and fade away in the firmament of the heavens, as they do when the great sun comes up and looks at them."

Dorothy answered nothing to this extravagant flattery. She wished but to get away from the odious

presence. However, this was not to be her good fortune so soon, for, as she did not reply, the chief rose, and walking up to her, he felt her arms and her shoulders; then stepped back a few paces to admire her from the front; then behind, touching her here and there and generally marking her good points, in the same way as judges examine and admire prize cattle.

After an examination lasting some minutes, the chief signalled to Kakani to take Dorothy back to her hut, and as they moved away she heard the coarse, boisterous laughter from Moseti and those with him.

So the day wore on, and then, as the sun set, Dorothy, half dead with fatigue after her long journey, the sleepless night, and the wearying day with all its horror, fell asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Come, Ivor, it is seven o'clock, and Tosi says we must be getting ready; for at any time Salmo may want us to rush out."

Ivor sat up. "All right, old man," he answered, "I'm quite ready." Then after a pause he asked, "Do you remember what Tosi reported Salmo had learned from the bones?"

"Yes," answered Harold. "But he told us several things. To which do you allude?"

"He said four would return. Well, old fellow, four can't very well return if we fail, for in that case both you and I will remain either dead men or captives. If, on the other hand, we should succeed, there will be six, for it is very unlikely that both Tosi and Salmo will fall while we escape; besides which, if they both fall, we would never find our way back to the entrance of the tunnel. Well, you may laugh or not as you like, but for myself I am a firm believer in the craft which Salmo follows. I have seen too many strange prognostications verified not to believe it, and I believe firmly, that what he says will come true in this case. Two of us will fall, of that I am certain. Who the

one will be I cannot of course say ; but I shall be the other."

"Never, Ivor ; if you fall, then will I fall beside you. We will not be parted," said Harold fervently.

"Nonsense, Harold ; you have Miss Delton to think of, and your primary object must be to save her."

"And leave you?" said Harold. "No, never, my dear old friend. We would rather all die together than that you should be left."

"Harold, my dear fellow, listen to me for a moment. We have come with the object of liberating Miss Delton. Since we left Itsobi we have learned that something worse than death threatens her, and from that we must save her at all costs. If I reach her first, I will endeavour to take her to safety ; but if you are first you must do so. You must not think of me, nor I of you, but both must think of her. Now, will you promise not to ruin the chances of getting her away by thinking of me, and I will give you my promise to do the same, should I be the one to have the opportunity of doing so? Come, promise, old fellow." Saying this, he laid his hand on Harold's shoulder and looked imploringly at him.

"Yes, Ivor," answered Harold. "I will promise. I *must* promise, for she must be saved at all costs, as you say. Still, why should you, too, not be saved?"

Ivor shook his head mournfully, and then he answered : "No, Harold, I feel certain that I shall fall. I had a presentiment when Tosi told us the result of Salmo's bone-throwing, and that presentiment has been with me ever since. To-night as I slept I dreamed of it, and in my dream I saw myself lying among the rocks on the mountain-side, wounded, while the infuriated Kafirs howled and danced madly round me, with assegais and knobkerries uplifted. If you escape, tell my people all about me, and give this watch to my mother. See, I will put it here in this crevice of the cave, so that you will know where to find it."

Just then Tosi came up to them, and told them

that Salmo was going to reconnoitre, and the three went out of the inner cavern into the darkness of the outer one, into which the tunnel opened.

Salmo scraped gently at the earth surrounding a small rock which closed the aperture, and then, pushing it gently, he dislodged it, letting in a cool draught of fresh air. Placing the rock quietly on the floor, he stood for a moment or two in silence to listen, lest perchance some one might be near; then, not observing any one, he drew his body through.

He was standing upon a narrow rock ledge on the face of the mountain. Straight above him rose the sheer basaltic rock, whilst it fell precipitously down many hundreds of feet below. The ledge upon which he stood was very narrow, scarcely wide enough for one man to walk along; but Salmo knew the path well, and he crept silently, though confidently, along it. About fifty yards of this, and then he was confronted by a great rock, upon which he climbed by means of small footholes cut into it. Up in this way for thirty feet or more, and then again he came to more level ground.

Here he stopped for a moment and listened, as the sound of a war dance in progress came down to him from the kraal on the heights above. He ground his teeth at the sounds made by those whom he so cordially hated; men belonging to the race which he had served for so long, and yet who had treated him so cruelly. Then on again, treading softly, for he knew that, as of old, there were sentries all about the mountain side. Now he turned again in his progress, and once more found himself on a ledge overhanging a precipice.

The rugged pathway was overgrown with bushes, and he had to tread very gently lest he might betray himself to some concealed sentry by breaking a twig. Suddenly he paused, and looked into the darkness about him. The path, which led to the sentry-posts down a portion of the mountain, crossed the secret track upon which he stood, somewhere here, and Salmo knew that near the junction of the two tracks a sentry used

to stand. He waited here in silence for some minutes, scarcely even drawing breath, and at last his patience was rewarded, for he saw, against the starlit sky, the head of a man behind a bush.

Slowly Salmo moved forward, approaching nearer and nearer to the unconscious man, who was leaning upon his spear, looking out into the blackness of the yawning abyss beneath him, while he listened to the weird sounds of the war dance above him.

Salmo crept up until he stood behind him, and so silent and cat-like had been his movements, that even the trained ear of the sentry had detected nothing.

A minute passed, and yet another, and still neither man moved; then, as the sounds in the kraal above swelled louder for an instant, Salmo crouched quickly down, and the next moment he sprang like a leopard at the throat of the sentry. There was no cry, scarce even a sound, while, with hands tightly clasped round the head of the other, Salmo twisted and broke his neck, and then tore at his throat with his teeth. Then, lifting the corpse up in his arms, he flung it far out into the darkness of the night far below.

This was the only sentry whose presence Salmo feared; the others were far below and not in a direct line down, or there might have been danger of their having heard the body fall. Only two other sentries were placed higher up, and their positions were far removed from the secret track, so that, this man away, the rest of the approach would be easy.

Then he returned whence he came, and, moving the stone, which he had previously replaced, he crept down and summoned the others by signal to follow him.

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN MOSETI'S KRAAL

**D**AY was drawing to a close, and the shadows of the earth-wall surrounding Moseti's kraal on the top of the mountain were lengthening as they stole across the circle.

Fainter and fainter became the light, until finally darkness had set in altogether, and the stars twinkled brightly, like so many diamonds in the canopy of the heavens.

Presently, the hut fires were lit all round the outer circle, showing up brightly the whole place. Then two or three natives entered the inner circle, each carrying in his arms a large bundle of wood, which each, in turn, deposited in the centre of the circle opposite to the three large huts. Then back out of the circle they went, only to return again within a few minutes laden with more wood. This deposited, they made another exit, and again returned, and so on until the pile of wood in the centre had reached a very considerable size.

The fuel having been brought for the fire, the men busied themselves with making other preparations for the night's amusement, or feast, or whatever it might be; and, having apparently got all in order, they proceeded to ignite the fuel.

Scarce had the first spark shown itself, when into the circle from one of its many entrances sprang the figure of a man, clothed with a leopard's skin round his waist, while on his body hung many a gruesome

trophy. In his hand he carried a long stick, which he whirled madly round his head as he approached the already brightly burning fire ; springing high in the air, each bound bringing him nearer and nearer to the fire, he came, singing as he proceeded :

"Come now, ye children of the king.

"He who rests upon the mountain top, watching from this his nest, like unto the eagle, for his foes.

"Come, ye people, come and lay your faces low in the dust, while enters in among you he who is your life giver, he who is your father ; Moseti, the great chief of the great king of the people, warrior of warriors. Come, ye children——"

So on sang, or rather shouted, the man, and, in obedience to his summons, the circle was soon lined with the denizens of the mountain top. In a few minutes the space in front of the chief's hut was the only vacant spot in the circle, excepting a space in the centre close to the fire.

Presently the voice of the chief's shieldbearer was heard, announcing Moseti's entrance from his hut into the arena, and as with one accord the assembly bowed itself to the earth, while the singer left the fire and approached the chief, bowing himself as he neared his august master, and singing in a most subdued voice as he approached :

"Welcome, O Great One, thy children await thee ;  
See prone on the earth they before thee are bending,  
For glory like thine their weak eyesight would blinden ;  
Welcome, Moseti, right hand of the king."

And here followed a whole string of titles, each illustrative of some deed done or supposed to have been done by the chief, or of some characteristic supposed to be possessed by him. All the assembly joined in singing out these flattering names and titles, and after looking highly pleased with himself for a moment or two, the chief sat down upon the mat which had been laid for him.

Then the singer ceased his song, and at a signal from Moseti there was silence for a short while, broken only by the cracking of the wood in the fire. Then, at another signal, the Kafir drums began to throb softly all round the circle, gradually increasing in sound and then dying away in soft cadence, only to swell louder again the next moment, the entire crowd humming softly the whole while. The effect produced was weird, and yet not without a certain amount of harmony.

Dorothy started awake at the sound of the drums, and at first could not remember where she was; then like a flash it all came back to her. She lay listening to the strange sounds so near her for a while, and then, growing used to them, she again dozed off.

Meanwhile, the proceedings in front of Moseti's hut continued.

Now a number of young girls entered the ring, and danced to the sound of the humming and the regular beat of the drums and clapping of hands. These danced on until, exhausted, they disappeared through the crowds, and others took their places.

After these a number of men, fully armed with shields, assegais, and knobkerries, sprang into the ring with loud shouts, holding their shields high above them, while they whirled the kerries about, striking downward here and there as if at some imaginary foe, and all the while keeping up a continuous movement with their feet. Louder and louder hummed the watching crowd, and louder grew the shouts of the dancers and the beat of the drums; then it would sink for a minute only to swell to a roar the next.

The dancers grew more and more excited as the dance progressed, springing madly about the fire and shouting the while. Every now and again, as if on a signal, each man would bring his knobstick on the face of his shield with a crash, and at the same time would spring high up in the air, coming down simultaneously

to the ground, making the whole arena appear to shake.

The sight was indeed a fine one in some respects, and still one which would have filled the stoutest heart with feelings akin to fear. The great roaring fire, lighting up the scene, showed the circle crowded all around with numbers of naked men fully armed, while nearly two score of men, dancing and shouting madly, their eyes gleaming with excitement, completed the grotesqueness of the scene.

At length, the dancers in turn took themselves off, while loud roars of acclamation came from the throats of the audience. Then, when the shouts were at their loudest, a signal was given by the chief, and almost instantly there was dead silence, while each one present looked eagerly at Moseti, who had risen and was walking towards the fire.

Moseti was certainly a fine-looking fellow, of that there could be no doubt; and even his veriest enemy would have to concede that much. Taller than the average man, his fine upright bearing seemed to give him additional height. His limbs were well made, and his broad chest gave further evidence of a fine physique.

He stopped for a moment as he reached the fire, and then turned to face his hut door, around which his chief headmen were gathered; then he spoke, and his voice was clear and rich, carrying without any apparent effort on his part to the farthest part of the circle.

"When the jackals are hungry they go from their holes into the veldt, and there they take what they find; so is it with the people of the race of the Gcaleka. They are hungry, and they go forth to hunt; but they hunger not for bread and meat, but for the blood of the white man, who would fain steal from the people what is theirs—their country. Is this not so, my children?"

A chorus of assent was the reply, and Moseti proceeded.

"Many moons have passed since the white man first came amongst us. What did we do? Did we kill them

as they came? No; we killed them not, as we might have done, for they were but few in number, while we were many. We let them stay on; we traded with them: but we have done wrong. Every moon brings with it fresh white men into our country, and already they are overcrowding everything. The country is no more ours, but theirs. They make the laws and we must obey; but the time has come when the people will throw off the yoke of the white man, and stand again, as they did in the time of their forefathers, a free people, owning no master but their King."

Loud shouts again greeted this, while the drummers beat their drums wildly.

"Now, again, is the hand of the white man lifted high to strike the black. That hand will wither and fall. The black wave from the land will wash into the sea the white dross, and the land will once again belong to those who dwelt in it when the sun, the moon, and the stars were young." He paused for a moment, then continued: "But all will not be slain, for there are some amongst these white people who are beautiful to look upon; these will we take as wives for our young men, and I, Moseti, will to-night, with the rising of the full moon, take unto myself her who is in yonder hut."

The people assented to this again with cries and shouts, and then the chief once more continued his speech, which was listened to with great attention, and cheered as occasion demanded.

"But the night draws on, my children, and soon above the kraal the full moon will show her face; that face which to-night looks down upon many a blood-stained spot on this our country, where our brothers have laid in the dust these white-faced men, whose blood we love. See! Already the sky in the east smiles at the coming of the moon, and on her coming will Nonga, my right hand, take his prize, and I, Moseti, will take mine."

The chief ceased speaking and walked back to his seat, while the crowd yelled, the drums were beaten, and

the hands of the multitude clapped. Then into the arena again sprang the dancers, and began to shout and dance, shaking their assegais and waving their knobsticks about them.

Brighter grew the sky with the coming of the moon ; still the dancers continued their mad frolicking, their eyes gleaming in the light, while from every pore in their bodies the perspiration literally poured.

Then the moon showed over the crest of the ridge, and almost instantly the dancing ceased and the circle began to empty itself, while numbers of the men set to work to extinguish the fire. Nonga and Moseti were, in a short while, the only two left in the circle, and for a few moments they stood talking together ; then they too turned and walked off, but not towards Moseti's hut. Nonga walked to the hut on one side of the chief's where Kakani lay, and Moseti towards the hut wherein Dorothy was quietly sleeping, oblivious to everything.

## CHAPTER XXII

### SPIRITS OR MFENE ?

UPON reaching the tunnel mouth again, Salmo told Tosi by signals that the pathway, though very much overgrown with bushes and other things, was still in existence, and he further signalled that it was now time to make the advance.

So the four crept quietly out into the open air, leaving the tunnel uncovered so that there might be as little delay as possible on their return. Then on they went, treading softly lest some one below or above might hear them. Salmo led the way, with Tosi a few yards behind him.

They had to exercise the greatest care in creeping along the narrow ledge, for but one false step and he who made it would fall headlong into the black, yawning abyss which lay below.

Once Harold dislodged a large stone with his foot, narrowly escaping falling himself by clinging on to a small bush above him. The stone disappeared over the ledge, and the four stood still for a minute listening breathlessly. Then, after waiting for a considerable time, they heard the stone striking the rocks far below, the echoes of the sound coming up clearly to them. Then it bounded along for a while, and again there was silence as it skipped over another precipice and fell some hundred feet farther down ; then the bounding, rolling, and crashing continued, until it died away in the distance, as the stone continued its headlong career.

The four stood silent, fearful lest their presence might be discovered ; then from far down the mountain-side came the voice of a man, but though the echoes carried his voice up to them, the words were inaudible. Then another voice, evidently belonging to a sentry very much higher than the first speaker, replied ; but he also was too far for them to hear plainly what he said, though the word "Mfene" \* could be heard frequently. This speaker must have addressed a question to the sentry above him, for soon they heard a voice replying, and though its owner must have been some two hundred feet below the four men on the ledge, the echoes were so clear that the voice appeared to them to be quite close underneath them.

Salmo felt anxious, for he knew that this man would in turn address the one above him, and he, Salmo knew, would answer no more questions ; so, approaching Tosi, he hastily signalled to him to follow, at the same time making him understand that the boys were to remain where they were standing.

Tosi communicated this in a whisper to Ivor, and then silently hastened after Salmo. The boys stood still and listened to the voice below them, which was replying to the questioner farther down.

"Yes, I heard it," said the voice. "But what spirit throws stones about, I know not. Perhaps you are right, it may be the *mfene*. But they are mad, to-night, for I heard something fall some time ago. No, it is not good. It is the spirit of Salmo, who, they say, walks on the mountain side sometimes."

The answer came up from the man below, but, as before, the words could not be distinguished ; then the nearer speaker again replied.

"I will ask Takosa, who stands above me ; perhaps he has seen the baboons, and can tell us if it be they. For myself, I like not this lonely place. Give me a lion or a man to fight, and I will face it as bravely as any man, but to stand here on this lonely spot where

\* Mfene = baboons.

spirits walk, I like not. Takosa, Takosa! Hi! Takosa! Art thou asleep?"

He was silent for a while, listening for a reply, and during the interval the boys became fearful lest Salmo and Tosi should walk unawares upon the man Takosa whose place must be somewhat near.

Then again the silence of the night was broken by the voice of the watchman. "Speak, Takosa," it said, "or art thou slumbering when thou should'st be watching; or, perchance, have the spirits torn thy tongue from thee, as thou didst at the chief's bidding to Salmo, ere he was cast into the Well of Death in the cavern inside the mountain?"

The voice was somewhat tremulous, for the speaker was evidently affected by not hearing Takosa reply.

For another moment there was silence, and then the boys were startled by hearing a voice—Tosi's voice—high above them, though somewhat—perhaps a hundred yards—to the right of them.

"No, I sleep not," it answered, "but the terror of hell is upon me. I, too, heard the stone fall, and I heard the sound earlier in the night; but these were hurled by no human arms. I saw who it was. It was Salmo, he whose tongue I tore out at the bidding of Moseti. The spirit of Salmo stood before me, and in his hand he carried his bleeding tongue. Speak not further to me, for the spirit is still about and I am in horror lest it should return. Move not from thy place until the day breaks; for the spirit, looking upon me with its eyes shining like fire in the darkness, signalled to me not to move from here, and I know that if I move but one inch I shall fall dead. Tomorrow, when the sun is up, shall I leave this place, and never again, even though disobedience to Moseti's commands brings death, shall I come here."

Then the boys heard the man below telling the sentry farther down. His voice was very shaky, and he said little.

"The spirit of Salmo is wandering on the mountain

side," the voice said. "It appeared to Takosa, and he told me; but there is fear in his voice, which hath so changed it that, had I not known he stood above me, I would not have recognised it. Tell thou to those below that the spirits walk; then keep silence."

The boys still stood on the narrow ledge waiting for the return of Salmo and Tosi, and about five minutes after hearing the voice, purporting to be Takosa's, but which really was Tosi's, Ivor felt a hand laid upon his arm, while Tosi whispered to him to follow. Ivor in turn communicated this to Harold, and they moved on.

When they had left the first ledge they met Salmo, and then Tosi explained to them in a whisper how Salmo had slain the man Takosa earlier in the night, and therefore, when he heard the man below just about to shout to Takosa, he had feared that if no answer were forthcoming the man might hasten up to see the reason, and not finding Takosa there, might tell the sentries above, and so alarm the kraal. For this reason Salmo had made Tosi speak for Takosa and warn the men below not to move. The sentries above had heard the supposed Takosa's reply, and Tosi said he had heard them pass the message from one to the other, so that from them too there would be no danger, for dread of Salmo's spirit would keep them in their places, for all the Kafirs believed that Salmo was dead, but, as he had occasionally shown himself at rare intervals, there was a legend among the people that his ghost haunted the mountain, and but few dared leave the kraal after dark, and then only did they do so in fear and trembling when forced to do duty as sentries.

Of all the people in the kraal, Tosi said, the chief was the most frightened, and next to him was Takosa, the man whom Salmo had killed; for he it was who had actually done the deed of tearing Salmo's tongue out.

The party halted for a few moments in order that the boys might recover a little, for they were somewhat

exhausted with standing so long in a cramped position on the ledge, hanging on by hands and feet to keep from falling, and this last little piece of the ledge had been particularly rough, demanding great care and, at the same time, exertion.

Then came the climb of the high rock which was mentioned earlier, wherein footholds had been cut, and then up a sharp acclivity which brought the party to a small plateau, where again they rested for a moment, so as to harbour their energies. A sharp turn to the left, and once more they were on a narrow ledge, which, however, was not very long ; and Tosi whispered to Ivor, as they proceeded, that it was near here where Salmo had killed the sentry.

A sharp turn, this time to the right, brought them on to the face of the mountain, and the boys wondered how they would ever get up ; but Salmo knew what he was about, and stooping, he moved aside the branches of a large bush, which appeared to grow out of a crevice, and disappeared, it seemed, into it, Tosi followed, and the boys after him.

It was, of course, pitch dark ; but as they groped about with their hands, they found that they were able to walk erect, and this they did until they came to some stone steps, up which they climbed, feeling carefully for each step. Then, after proceeding up for a few moments, Salmo struck a light, and showed them that they were upon a stone stairway in a narrow space, though amply high enough for them to walk upright in. Then the light was again extinguished, and they proceeded upwards, now turning to the left, now to the right ; then straight up for awhile, and then again to right or left. After going up in this way for what must have been quite twenty minutes, the stairs ceased, and they walked along a level passage for some minutes, and then the passage narrowed down so much that they could barely squeeze along on hands and knees. To make matters worse, the ground had grown very wet, and the further they went the wetter it became, until

in a few moments they found they were creeping through a pool which almost reached up to their stomachs. A few yards ahead they could hear the rushing, gurgling sound of water, falling and tumbling over rocks and stones. A turn brought them to what appeared to be the mouth of the tunnel, but over it the water was rushing from somewhere above. They were now almost on to it, and Salmo, without even looking back, dashed through on hands and knees, and the others followed.

When they got through they found themselves on a small rock platform, upon which the water fell and then dashed off again. They were all drenched to the skin, and, besides that, the air on the mountain top was cold; but these matters were of small moment beside the work which lay before them, so, after standing for a few moments to gain breath, the party, headed by Salmo, again proceeded.

The way he now took was directly along the side of the mountain, the summit of which was not very far off. The sounds from the kraal seemed very close and almost directly above them, but the way they were going seemed to be leading them away from it.

The yells and shouts from the excited warriors in the kraal above, as they proceeded with the dance, were fearful, and Harold all the while was wondering how Dorothy would be feeling. He pictured her with eyes wet with weeping, crouching in the corner of the hut, with fingers in her ears striving to keep the hideous sounds from reaching her, and the thought made him mad with the brutes who were causing her so much agony.

Suddenly a voice brought him back to the present. They had turned a corner, and there, before them, his body showing clearly against the sky-line, stood a tall Kafir.

"Who is it?" he asked, never for a moment thinking it was any but some of his own tribe, for who else could come up that inaccessible mountain.

"It is Salmo," answered Tosi ; and, before the poor wretch could even turn to look or utter a cry, Tosi's assegai had pierced him to the heart, and he fell where he had stood. Salmo sprang forward, and, chuckling to himself with demoniacal glee, he clubbed the dead man several times with his kerrie, until the whole head was battered in ; then, taking the body up in his strong arms, he hid it in a large bush and proceeded.

Another sharp climb, another level plateau, yet another climb upwards, and the top of the mountain was reached. Then they turned and walked towards the kraal ; then up the embankment or natural wall which surrounded it, and here they lay, watching the dance as it proceeded, scarcely fifty yards away from them.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WHEN THE FULL MOON ROSE

STRAIGHT towards Dorothy's hut walked Moseti, and, in a few minutes, he stood within beside her, as she lay.

"Come, thou most beautiful of women, thou fairest of flowers," he said, leaning over her.

Dorothy awoke with a start and a scream, for, like a flash, she realised the hopelessness of her position, for that which she dreaded and feared most was about to happen. She raised her hand to her mouth, but a more terrible trial awaited her. She found that even the comfort of death had been denied her, for in her sleep she had dropped the roots which Kakani had given her.

Moseti bent down lower and pressed his coarse lips on her soft cheek, and as he did so she uttered another shriek and fainted away. Suddenly something darkened the entrance and sprang upon Moseti from behind. There was a dull cracking sound, and then with a moan Moseti fell down, stunned and bleeding. Harold entered, and, catching up Dorothy in his arms, he rushed from the hut with her, and Salmo, who had struck the chief down, followed.

Outside they met Kakani, who was standing with hands clasped while Tosi and Ivor were engaged in deadly conflict with Nonga, who, wild with rage, was fighting desperately and yelling out to awaken the kraal.

At last Tosi got in a thrust, and Nonga fell wounded

and bleeding, and then, headed by Salmo, the party made for the opening leading out of the inner circle. Harold had Dorothy still folded in his arms ; but she had now recovered, so, in order to facilitate their speed, he put her down, and taking her hand, they rushed through the gateway.

Scarce had they passed through, when numbers of men ran out from the huts between the palisade and the natural wall ; but they were already half through the huts before the natives, still dazed with sleep, realised what had occurred, and the fugitives had almost reached the gateway in the natural wall before they were seen. Then, with mad yells, on came their pursuers.

Reaching the exit, the fugitives turned, but, before Harold and Ivor could fire off their revolvers or Tosi hurl an assegai, a strange thing happened. The entire crowd of their pursuers stood still and lowered their spears.

"Salmo," they yelled. "The spirit of Salmo has come amongst us." They had caught sight of Salmo, and as he made a step forward towards them the crowd drew back.

Tosi was not backward in taking advantage of this. "Come," he said. "They think it is Salmo's ghost. Let us go on ; Salmo will follow. They will discover before long that it is not the ghost of Salmo, but he himself, and then will they come after us."

So, half lifting, half carrying Dorothy along between them, Ivor and Harold followed Tosi and Kakani, who were quickly moving along the way whence Salmo had brought them. Meanwhile the yells in the kraal had subsided, and every minute was bringing them nearer and nearer to safety.

Suddenly there was a loud renewal of the yells, and then the fugitives knew that either Salmo's real identity had been discovered, or else the natives had decided at all hazards to recapture Dorothy and Kakani.

On and on sped the party, while nearer and nearer

drew the sounds of the pursuing host. Now the first declivity was reached, and down this they scrambled hastily ; then down along the level where the native had been killed they rushed, and, in a short time, they reached the waterfall. But here a great horror awaited them, for there, sitting in the bright light of the moon before the waterfall, was a figure. Harold raised his revolver and fired, but his arm was unsteady with the speed at which he had come and the bullet went wide. Ivor instantly raised his revolver, but just as his finger pressed the trigger the figure rose and they saw it was Salmo.

"Come, come, no time," said Tosi, "they are almost on us"; and true enough, the yells all about the mountain side—some above where the party were standing, some below, some on the right, and, in fact, all round—told that, unless their movements were speedy, their position would soon be discovered.

Salmo dashed through the water into the tunnel beyond, and with a few words to reassure Dorothy, Harold took her hand and followed ; then he crept in before her through the mud and slush to drier ground, until at last the broader passage was reached, and here Harold whispered to Dorothy that she might rise.

"How can I thank you for this, Mr. Morton?" Dorothy said, when at last she had sufficiently recovered her breath.

"By not thanking me at all, Miss Delton," he answered. Then he added after a pause, "What a fearful time you must have had ; but, thank God, that is now well over, and I trust we will soon get free and be able to hand you over safely to Mrs. Warren."

Then Ivor crept up, and, hearing Harold's voice next to him, he too rose, and in another minute Tosi and Kakani followed through into the tunnel.

"Well, we are all here," Harold said cheerfully.

"Yes ; and Tosi wants us to move on at once, so let us get on."

"Are we quite safe now, Mr. Risk?" asked Dorothy.

"Hardly, Miss Delton. I wish I could assure you that we were," he answered. "Still, we have got through as bad a stage as I expect we shall ever again be called upon to undergo. One blessing is, that these tunnels are unknown to the natives; but, unfortunately, we have to come out into the open after we leave this, and the great danger lies between this and the opening of the next."

The party were meanwhile moving on, and soon were descending the stone stairway, but, on reaching the mouth, they heard voices outside. Not knowing the place, Dorothy was naturally nervous, for the voices seemed so near, and, as it was pitch dark inside, she could not tell whether the owners of the voices might not also be inside the cavern. But Harold felt the tremor which passed through her body as she leant against him, and he reassured her in a whisper that, for the present, they were safe, as none except Salmo knew of the existence of the passage in which they were; and he also told her that the entrance was covered by a large bush, so that it was unlikely that it would be discovered. Then they all listened intently to the conversation which was going on outside.

The voices proceeded from two natives, whose loud panting gave evidence to the fact that they had been running and climbing hard.

"Whoa," said one, "but the spirit can run. It ran and jumped like a baboon, and then disappeared altogether. Truly it was the spirit of Salmo, for I saw it near me, and I knew Salmo in life and it was he. But of the others: were they, too, spirits?"

"No," answered the other. "They were not spirits, for I saw them as they stood behind Salmo at the entrance of the kraal, and they were white."

"But how then came they on the mountain?" asked the first. "None but Salmo knew the secret way, and he is dead, and spirits do not show the secrets of their forefathers to strangers."

"Ay," again rejoined the other; "but the spirit of Salmo hated the chief and the tribe—for was the spirit's body not killed by the people of this, his own tribe? Yet will we search for those white men and the great black man with them, and the two women whom they have taken away from the kraal, and, when we find them, then shall we kill them one by one."

So on went the conversation for some minutes longer, and then having apparently rested long enough, the men moved off to join the other searchers on the mountain, whose voices rang out clearly from different positions.

Salmo waited for a few minutes, and then he crept through the bush, closely followed by the others.

On they moved, as swiftly as the rough nature of their way would permit them. Now stopping for a minute and creeping silently behind some bush, as they heard voices near to them; then on again. The mountain seemed teeming with people, for from all around they could hear voices.

Once they were in very great danger, for they suddenly rounded a corner, and there under a bush sat two forms, only very dimly discernible in the shadow. Tosi was, fortunately, in advance; and as Salmo, who was immediately behind him, heard the voices, he stopped suddenly, and those behind him had perforce to stop too, for the pathway was narrow.

The two men on the ground looked up, but in the shadows they only saw Tosi's figure.

"Well, have you found them?" asked one, with a half laugh.

"No," answered Tosi. "But who can catch spirits? If we are not careful, more of us will meet with death. I have brought with me not less than five others, and yet here I find two men alone. Come, move from the pathway, for it is but narrow, and I fain would pass quickly from these parts. For near

this spot has the spirit of Salmo often been seen to walk."

The two men, glad of some excuse, moved off, and Tosi followed slowly, so that the distance between them might be widened.

So on they walked until they neared the part where the secret path was crossed by the path leading to the various sentry stations, and here, some fifty yards ahead of them, the two natives were seen to turn off.

Once past the place where Takosa had been killed, and they would be in comparative safety. They were now on it, and Tosi moved on to the place where the sentry had been, so as to allow the others to pass before him on to the ledge; and as they did so, Tosi noticed that the two men who had turned off here were now returning to the spot.

As they descried him, one of them, taking him to be Takosa, called out, "Takosa, from whence come you now? We have scarce passed the place where you stand, and you were not there."

They were now not ten paces away, and Tosi had to answer something.

"All is well; I only stepped aside as I heard you coming, for I feared lest it might be the spirit."

"Whoa!" cried out both men, stopping suddenly; while one continued, "That is not the voice of my brother Takosa. Come, let us see the impostor"; and bounding forward, they came on.

But Tosi knew that if he stayed longer detection would inevitably follow, so with a shout to warn the others in advance, he sprang away and along the narrow ledge, the two men following closely with loud yells, crying out to the other searchers that they had found the fugitives.

Meanwhile, the others had pressed on, and were already nearly on the second ledge when the shouts behind them, which were taken up on all sides and



"Harold . . . saw Ivor stagger, and he only just saved him from falling by putting out his arm."

[To face p. 136.



above and below, told them that they were discovered so they hurried on as hard as they could.

Tosi flew along after them ; but the two behind him were fresh, whereas he was tired out with his long journey, and they were gaining upon him. Moreover, they had been joined by some others, while from above rocks and stones were being hurled.

The place seemed to have been converted into a veritable pandemonium with the yells of the people around and the crash of rocks hurled from above, which happily could do but little harm, for the cliff above the ledge overhung it somewhat.

At length, however, Tosi reached the main body of his party, and they were now less than ten yards away from the mouth of the tunnel. Ivor Risk was the last, and just as Tosi came up with him an assegai struck the faithful native, and he dropped down into the precipice without a yell. Ivor was horror-stricken, and a feeling of deep regret came over him at the loss of one who had always been a good friend to him ; but this was not the time for thought, and just then he saw two naked forms creeping along the ledge towards him, silently but swiftly.

"For God's sake make haste," he yelled to those in front. But his warning was unnecessary, for already Miss Delton and Kakani had been pushed through the opening, and Salmo followed.

Harold was halfway through when he saw Ivor stagger, and he only just saved him from falling by putting out his arm. Then, raising his revolver, he fired two shots in quick succession, and two more bodies fell over into the depths below.

Ivor had an assegai sticking in his side, and without waiting to move it Harold lifted him in, assisted by Salmo. Then Salmo leant out and replaced the stone, and at last they were all in safety. All excepting Tosi. Harold immediately endeavoured to withdraw the assegai from between Ivor's shoulders ; but as he leant over his old friend he saw at a glance that nothing he could do

would avail, for Ivor was fast breathing his last. The spear had penetrated almost through him, and in its passage must have wounded his lung. Harold, when he realised that Ivor was dying, felt benumbed with sorrow, greater than any he had ever before known.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FOUR WHO RETURNED

“DO not wait for me, Harold ; but take Miss Delton into safety,” Ivor said, as he lay on the ground, with his head supported in Harold’s arms.

Harold whispered in his ear that there was no danger for a while, for it was scarcely likely that the natives would attempt to follow at once. Firstly they would have to enter through the narrow aperture, and one man standing inside could defend the position against thousands without much danger to himself. Ivor looked relieved, and he murmured his thanks as Miss Delton bent over him and endeavoured to stop the flow of blood from the great hole in his side.

The scene was indeed a terrible one, and one which both Harold and Dorothy knew they would carry with them to their last days.

By the flickering light of the torch that Salmo had lit on entering the tunnel, Harold and Dorothy saw each other looking sad and anxious ; while Ivor, with a look of patient and manful resignation, gazed at each alternately between the short gasps by which he was respirating.

At last the gasps became shorter and fainter, and those looking on saw that the end was very near. Then Dorothy bent her head lower, and, with the tears streaming from her eyes, she kissed the dying man. A smile flitted gently across his face, and, putting out his hand, he took hers in his, and with the

other he took Harold's disengaged hand, and then with a sigh he fell backward.

Salmo and Kakani rose and came forward, and took Ivor's lifeless form out of Harold's arms.

"Go," said Kakani; "Salmo and I will follow along the passage after we have buried him whom you two love as a brother. Stay now no longer, but go."

"Yes, Miss Delton, let us go; we can do no more here, and I am anxious to get you away to safety. Listen!" and he held up his hand. "Yes," he continued, "they are outside, and are trying to get the stone away. Come."

Just then the stone was rolled away, and simultaneously a head and a pair of black shoulders appeared; but with a yell and a leap Salmo had bounded forward, and, like a flash, down came his knobstick crashing into the brains of the intruder, and knocking the body back through the aperture and down into the depths of the abyss below.

Harold and Dorothy heard a chorus of yells from the outside, and then they waited for no more, but retreated back down the passage.

On they walked and crept, as space permitted, resting sometimes for a moment, and then on again. At length, tired out, they reached one of the recesses, and here they halted for a while to rest and to wait for the others.

Long they waited here, and as Harold noted by his watch that the hour lengthened into two hours and was approaching the third, he became very anxious, and wanted to go back to hear if the natives were still endeavouring to get through.

But Dorothy clung to his arm. "No, do not go," she half-sobbingly said. "Stay with me! Salmo can keep the passage. I cannot bear the thought of you risking your life again."

"No, darling, then I will not go," he answered; and then, suddenly, he realised what he had said, and felt ashamed of his conduct.

How dared he take advantage of the girl's position and the circumstances under which they were both placed, in order to make love to her by using such endearing terms. He felt sure that she cared for him ; yet, up to the present they had only been friends, and after all, he had known her only a very short time. He looked up at her, but her face in the dim light of the torch showed no surprise, so that the "I beg your pardon" died away unspoken on his lips, and he hoped that she had not heard the word. She was still crying quietly at the thought of Risk's death. It seemed so sad to her, and she could not help reproaching herself for having been the cause of bringing the boys to her assistance.

"Had I not left that note on the bush, they would probably not have known where to follow, and after a few days' search they would have returned to Itsobi," she thought. But then again the thought came, that had she not left the note, they would have wandered about the country, searching for a clue which they might never have got, and would probably have fallen in with stray bands of Kafirs, and then both would have been killed.

Harold saw that she was engrossed in thought, but for a long time he was unwilling to intrude upon her meditations ; but at length he asked her what she was thinking about, and as she answered him he said, "Never again blame yourself ; but remember that, when we set out from Itsobi that night, we both swore that we would neither of us return unless you were with us or in perfect safety, and we also agreed to each other that no matter what happened to either of us, whether captured or wounded or killed, the other would think only of your safety."

Long they sat speaking thus to each other, until at length, close at hand, they heard a sound which indicated to them that some one was approaching. Harold cocked his revolver and sat watching the tunnel mouth, ready to fire should the head which was

to appear be neither Salmo's or Kakani's; but, a moment after, he returned his revolver to his pocket as Kakani crept through, and, gaining the recess, stood erect.

"What has delayed you so long, Kakani?" Harold asked; and she told him that for a long time after they had left Salmo had been engaged guarding the entrance, and he had knocked down scores as they came, one by one. Then, when there had been a cessation of the attack, Salmo had cautiously peered out of the opening, and saw that there were no more men on the track; so, placing her to watch, he had buried Ivor's body.

Scarce had he done this when Kakani saw numbers were coming along the track, one by one, and in a moment Salmo was again busy, braining and pushing men out of the tunnel mouth and down the precipice. How many he had served thus Kakani could not tell, but there were scores at least. Why they were so persistent, and why they did not take warning from the fates of those who went and who fell before them, she knew; for from the scraps of conversation which they shouted to each other outside, she had gathered that the chief had sent these men to follow the fugitives, and had warned them, that unless the two women were brought back, dead or alive, they would each be put to death by means of the most terrible torture. Hence, rather than return to suffer agonies, they willingly faced certain death.

At length, all those who had been sent by Moseti lay in a mangled heap at the foot of the precipice, and then Salmo had indicated to Kakani to follow Harold and Dorothy, and handed her the few papers and little odds and ends which he had taken from Ivor's pockets. Then he sat down upon a stone at the tunnel mouth, and, with his knobstick across his knees, remained as if waiting for fresh attacks.

Harold took the papers and other things from Kakani and put them in his pocket, and then, as

Kakani stated that she had rested sufficiently, they set off again.

They moved slowly and rested frequently, found at length, after many hours, they emerged into the great cave where Salmo lived. Harold arranged with Kakani that he and she would watch the entrance leading into the cave from the tunnel in turns, for he feared lest Salmo might be overpowered at the other end, in which case he knew that they would be followed.

It was arranged that Harold should take first watch ; but before taking up his post he fetched wood from the cavern above and lit a fire, whereat he prepared some food from Salmo's stores of dried meat. Then, having made fairly comfortable sleeping places for Kakani and Dorothy, the three sat round the fire near to the tunnel mouth, so that they might watch it while they ate.

Supper being ended, the two tired women laid themselves down upon their rude beds of straw, and soon slept as if on the softest down. The night passed on uneventfully, and after Harold had awakened Kakani, he too slept soundly and undisturbed.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LAST OF SALMO

THE question which troubled Harold the next day, when he awoke and thought out the position of the party of which he formed the head, was whether it were better to remain in the cavern for a day or two longer, or whether to proceed at once to Itsobi. If they remained in the cavern they would suffer from hunger, for the stock of provisions had been almost exhausted by the two meals they had already taken, and there was now scarcely sufficient left for another meal. Then, again, he feared that, should they emerge from the cave, they might fall again into the hands of those whom he knew would be scouring the country for miles around in search of them, and he knew, too, that if retaken there would be no hope of escape. At last, after casting the matter about in his mind, he determined to wait until Salmo should arrive.

It was now over twelve hours since they had left Salmo, and Harold was puzzled to know what had detained him so long.

If Salmo had successfully held the mouth of the cavern, surely the natives would before now have given up the attempt in view of the impossibility of entering it. Then, again, if this had been so, surely Salmo would have seen that the attempt had been abandoned and would have followed the party.

Should, however, the attempt not have been abandoned, then certainly Salmo would have been overcome by now; for no human being—if indeed Salmo were

one—could withstand a continuous attack by hundreds for so many hours, especially after the trying work which he had undergone for hours previous to the time when he first took his stand inside the mouth of the cave to defend it against intruders. And if overcome by sleep, or if injured or killed, the attackers would have entered the cave, and would long ere this have arrived at the other end of the passage; but up to now no sign or sound had been made.

Harold sat meditatively on a rock at the tunnel mouth, watching quietly and thinking out these things; but hour after hour passed, and still no sign. Dorothy and Kakani were meanwhile attending to the fire, and busying themselves with whatever their hands could find to do in order to keep themselves from despondency, as well as to provide comfort for themselves and Harold, in case it should be necessary to remain in the cave for any length of time.

Suddenly Harold heard a slight sound in the tunnel, as if somebody were coming through it, and in an instant he had his revolver pointed at the gap ready to fire should it not be Salmo who appeared; but just as suddenly he dropped his arm, as, by the flickering light of the fire, he saw Salmo's head emerge.

So quietly did Salmo enter that it was not until he stood erect before the tunnel mouth that Dorothy and Kakani, looking up, saw him. Harold would fain have signalled to them to keep away, for Salmo presented a sight awful to behold; but scarcely did they descry the figure than they crossed over and stood beside Harold.

Salmo was bleeding profusely from many wounds all over his face and body. Across his left cheek, from below his temple to his jaw, was a terrible open scar; his right eye was closed and his right arm hung limp at his side, while across his chest there was a deep cut, and in his side a large hole. But more terrible than all, in his uninjured hand, clutched by the hair, were the heads of two of the natives, their tongues protruding from their mouths and their eyes glaring.

At this horrible sight Harold almost turned ill, and Dorothy shrank away and buried her face in her hands. Kakani drew her away to the farthest corner, that she might no longer look at the dreadful sights.

For a few moments Salmo stood thus ; then, uttering a loud gurgle, he raised the heads in the air and dashed them down on the floor before him, making the blood splutter on the nearest walls, and even on Harold. Then, still gurgling fiercely, he sprang about madly, and rolled along the floor, and Harold knew that he was mad.

Scarcely had Harold come to this conclusion when, with a gurgle still louder than any sound he had previously made, Salmo rose once more to his feet, and stood still for a moment, eying Harold with his one remaining eye, which flashed fire ; then with three bounds he crossed to the spot where the water roared through the floor into the depths below, turned round, and as Harold bounded forward to save him, for he now saw his intention, he leaped forward once more and disappeared for ever into the terrible abyss.

Harold's first fear was lest the others had seen this tragedy enacted, but upon turning round, he saw with relief that they were not looking in that direction, and as the roaring of the waters was so great he knew they had heard no sound.

With the awful picture still before him he rose and approached the others, determined at all costs to get away from the place which was now more than ever hideous and revolting. Owing to the noise he could not tell them his plans, but taking Dorothy by the hand, he led her up the stone steps which led to the chamber above, and Kakani followed. Although it was only the day before yesterday since he had passed here, it seemed to him as if it had been years ago, for so many events had been crowded into the short space of time.

Remembering the gruesome trophies which Salmo had always kept in the chamber above, he told Dorothy, as

soon as they got out of the sound of the roaring cascade and he could make himself heard, to close her eyes.

Reaching the cavern above, Harold lost no time in finding the rope ladder, which hung from the roof; then, taking Dorothy in his arms, he mounted speedily, and when they reached the top he instructed her how to move the stone which covered the mouth. Then with a sigh of relief they once more stood in the open air, dazzled for the moment by the light of the sun.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### RECAPTURE

FOR a moment they stood thus in silence, until they were joined by Kakani, who stood beside them until her eyes grew accustomed to the light ; then they went down the hill to where Harold knew the horses were standing.

Remembering what Tosi had said, that no natives ever came near the hill, Harold had no fear of their being seen ; neither had he any doubt but that the horses would still be found where they had been tethered, and upon arriving at the donga he found that they were safe. An abundance of food had been placed within their reach by Tosi, and, as there was a spring of water near, they had not wanted for anything ; but they had missed their masters, and now, as they espied Harold, they neighed with pleasure.

After the party had rested for an hour or so Harold deemed that it was advisable for them to commence their journey without further delay, as it was already long past noon, and the journey to Itsobi would in any case take them more than a day. So, after having rubbed the horses down with a damp cloth, Harold put Dorothy upon his horse, while Kakani mounted Ivor's old animal ; then they proceeded, Harold walking beside Dorothy.

Thus they went on hour by hour, not stopping for a moment until the sun began to dip behind the moun-

tains in the west ; then, finding a place under a steep cliff, the foot of which was covered by trees and undergrowth, they guided their horses in and encamped for the night.

Harold could not sleep, and even if he could he would not, for he was consumed with anxiety on Dorothy's behalf ; so he sat up the whole night watching and listening.

Once he heard a sound as of horses tramping, and in a moment he stood between his own horses in fear and trembling lest they might neigh. The sound came nearer and nearer, and he could hear the voices of the riders.

To his terror they drew rein just below the little belt of trees which covered the foot of the cliff, and in which they were camped.

Once Ivor's horse laid back his ears and prepared to neigh, but Harold tore his cap off and flicked the horse in its eyes to divert its attention. Then he heard the party move off once more.

Whether these were searching for them, he knew not ; he scarcely thought so, since he believed that the Kafirs were under the impression that they were still in the cave ; but this he knew—they were Kafirs, for he recognised the language, though he could not hear what was said.

At length, overcome with fatigue, Harold lost consciousness, and was soon fast asleep ; but as he slept, it seemed to him as though he were still awake. He was sitting on the ground leaning his back against a tree, when suddenly he saw a huge cobra come out of the bushes, its eyes glistening in the starlight as it approached him. Nearer and nearer it came, until it was within a yard of him ; then it rose on its tail and hung over him with its horrible mouth open, and the terrible fangs sticking out. Fascinated and spell-bound Harold gazed into its eyes ; he tried to move, but he seemed unable to do so—he was as it were glued to the ground. Suddenly the form of the cobra

changed into that of a man, a fierce, huge, naked Kafir, who stood before him with battle-axe uplifted. Again some strange, unexplainable force kept him in his place. Then the Kafir left him and approached to where Dorothy was lying, and he raised his axe once more. Harold made a superhuman effort this time to rise, and . . . awoke.

The morning was just breaking. In front of him, with assegais pointed, stood three naked Kafirs; while ten yards off sat Dorothy, with several other natives fully armed squatted around her. Kakani was nowhere to be seen.

Harold's first thoughts were, of course, for Dorothy. How he blamed himself for having allowed sleep to overcome him. How he cursed his own untrustworthiness!

He looked up towards Dorothy, and she, meeting his glance, smiled at him; but the smile brought him no consolation—he felt reproached by it. It seemed to him as if he alone were responsible for their capture. Grieved at heart and rended by remorse, he sat silent and gloomy, not deigning even to answer the questions with which the natives deluged him.

To add to his depression and anxiety, he found that Nonga was at the head of the party which had captured them.

The Kafirs had now built up a large fire and were sitting round it, warming themselves and talking; for, finding that Harold would not answer them, they had left him, after tying him securely to the tree under which he had slept.

From the excited manner of Nonga Harold guessed that that worthy was very much put out about something, and from the frequent mention of Kakani's name it soon became evident to him that it was her absence from them which was puzzling and annoying Nonga.

At first, when Harold awoke and had noticed that Kakani was not with them, he had for the moment

feared that she might have betrayed them and then deserted ; but in a moment he had felt ashamed of having, even for an instant, harboured such an unjust thought. He remembered, too, that the terrible fate which awaited her, should she be recaptured, would be worse even than that which would be Dorothy's or his. Then a ray of hope entered in upon him, as the thought occurred to him that perhaps Kakani had escaped and had gone to lead assistance to them.

The natives still continued to jabber and gesticulate violently. Nonga was evidently urging the others to do something at which they demurred ; but, gradually, he seemed to be winning them all over to his way of thinking, for one by one the others ceased speaking, until Nonga's voice alone could be heard.

Suddenly Nonga made a sign to the others, and they all arose and approached Harold. Raising him to his feet they bound him in a standing position to the tree, and when this was done they all stood before him, while one of their number stepped forward and spoke to Harold in broken English.

"White man," he said, "listen to the message I bring you. You entered like a thief into the place of Moseti ; you and others came there, into the place where none but the king's own children ever come. You took, like a thief, her whom the chief would have taken to wife, and her also whom Nonga, the chief's right hand, was to have. Three of you have fallen, but three still remain ; you and the White Lily ; but where is the other, she who is Nonga's ? Speak and tell us where we may find Kakani, that we may give her back to Nonga."

In a moment Harold realised that they were not aware that Kakani had only just escaped ; they were evidently under the impression that she had left them some time ago, and he also realised that to undeceive them would mean to put them immediately on her track, and this would be certain recapture for her, and the slight hope of their escape which rested with Kakani

getting clear away would be entirely gone ; so he determined to keep a sullen silence, which they might interpret as they liked. The native repeated the question, but Harold, true to his resolve, made no reply. Again and again the question was put, but Harold looked back defiantly into his eyes without answering a word.

At this Nonga grew furious, and motioned to one of the others to approach. This man did so, and pricked Harold on the thigh with his assegai, making a wound about half an inch long and as deep, from which the blood poured ; but Harold, although the pain was great, never as much as stirred. Again the question was asked, but again it met with the same reception. Again the man with the assegai approached, and Harold braced himself together to keep from making any sound or in any way showing that he felt the pain.

Just as the native advanced with his spear to inflict another stab there was a loud shriek, a dull thud, and the man staggered three or four yards holding his head, from which the blood flowed ; and Dorothy stood between Harold and his tormentors, with her beautiful eyes flashing with anger, while in her hand she still held the stone with which she had struck the native. Thus they all stood in silence for a moment ; the natives, taken by surprise, merely gazed at her as she stood before them, beautiful, defiant, and full of proud anger. Then they with one accord, loudly laughing, turned towards their bruised companion, who still stood rubbing his head, while the blood trickled down his face and neck.

Harold was fearful lest Dorothy would straightway suffer for her hastiness ; but it seemed not, for the natives now all retired to the fire again, leaving Dorothy standing where she was in front of Harold.

Presently the man who had spoken to Harold in English rose and came towards them, and addressed Harold.

"When the sun goes down behind the mountains

to-day, then will we also go ; but you will still stand here. The White Lily will go with us to be the wife of the chief. You will stay here to be the food of the jackals."

Then he turned and walked back.

## CHAPTER XXVII

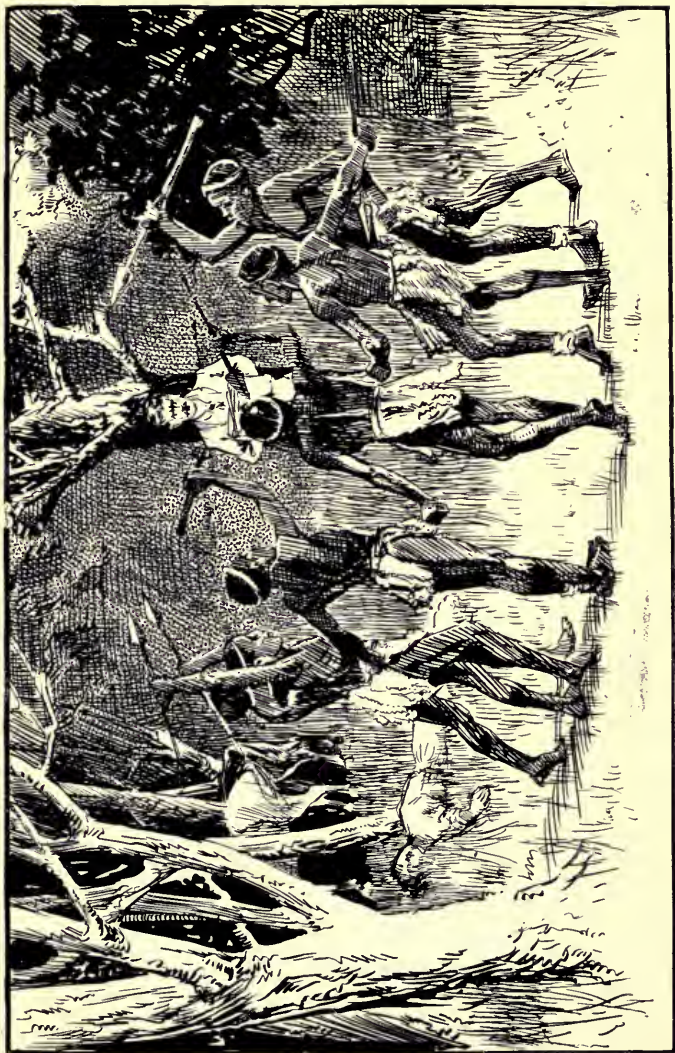
### ON THE VERGE OF DEATH—A NARROW ESCAPE— DARKNESS AND LIGHT

**S**LOWLY the sun crossed the sky until it stood in the west above the mountain, and yet, to the two who stood speaking together, how short the time appeared. Another hour, and then the sun would be gone; already it was nearing the horizon formed by the mountains. Another hour after that, and they would no longer see it; then would come darkness, and with it death.

"If they do actually leave you tied up here, Harold, oh, what shall I do? It is awful."

"Come, Dorothy, dry your tears; don't cry. The time we have together is so short. I don't think they will leave me to die; they are sure to kill me first, and, after all, it is not such a terrible thing to die."

So they talked on and on of things which were, and of things which might have been; until the sun had long sunk and darkness was setting in fast. Then the natives arose, and, as Dorothy perceived them approaching, she slipped a few roots which Kakani had given her—and which she had thought she had lost, until after escaping from the mountain, when she had discovered them in her pocket—into Harold's hand. "If they leave you here to die, then try and slip your one hand loose and eat these roots; it is better to die that way than to suffer the terrible pangs of hunger and thirst. I too will take some at the last, if I cannot by other means escape from Moseti. Good-bye, darling,



“The arms began to swing to and fro, gathering impetus for the throw; a second more, half a second——”

[To face p. 154.



before they come." She clasped him round the neck and kissed his face, while tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Good-bye, Dorothy, think of me sometimes if you should escape. I know you will. Kiss me again, darling." But before Dorothy could do so she was roughly pulled away by the man whom she had struck, who now held her by the arm.

The horses were all saddled and Dorothy was lifted on to one of them, while the men, leaving their horses standing, approached Harold again to question him about Kakani; but again he answered nothing.

Then they retired about twenty paces from the tree to which he was tied, and Dorothy was horrified to see that each man was feeling the blade of his spear. She sprang off her horse and rushed forward towards Harold; but again the native whom she had struck caught her, and brought her back.

How can we describe Dorothy's feelings at the terrible tragedy which was about to take place before her very eyes! To witness any one die is at all times trying; to watch any one murdered must be terrible indeed; but who can describe the utter helplessness, the terror, or the grief of one who watches one whom she loves more than life itself being murdered in cold blood. Dorothy watched, with eyes almost starting from their sockets, while all the terrible preparations were being made; then, as she saw the men raise their assegais to hurl them at Harold, she uttered a piercing shriek and swooned away.

That shriek saved Harold, because for a moment the men paused to turn and look back towards the spot where Dorothy lay. The next instant they again raised their assegais. Harold closed his eyes in prayer; then he raised them again and looked steadfastly in front of him at the eight arms raised above the shoulders, waiting for the word of command, when the weapons would hurtle through the air and bury themselves in his breast.

The arms began to swing to and fro, gathering impetus for the throw; a second more, half a second—

The word to throw was already on Nonga's lips, as he stood a few paces away, when, "Fire!" came a voice, and simultaneously a dozen or more rifles cracked, and six of the natives lay dead, Nonga being one of their number, while the remaining three turned to fly; before they had gone six steps they too were shot down.

From among the trees now sprang some twelve or thirteen men of the F.A.M.P., who in a very short time had loosened Harold's hands, and he stood free.

Without a word he first led them to where Dorothy was lying; but he found that he had been forestalled, for beside her knelt Kakani, under whose care she was rapidly regaining consciousness.

The officer in charge told Harold that his party had been sent out from the main body to reconnoitre, and on their way had met Kakani, who had brought them to the spot. Just as they neared the place they heard Dorothy shriek, and had hurried on, to arrive only just in time to save Harold's life.

Dorothy had by this time recovered, but was so overcome with joy at finding Harold safe, and by the stress and anxiety of the past, that she felt weak and ill; so the officer determined to push forward at once for Itsobi.

Some hours after leaving they arrived at the main column, and the officer-in-chief gladly placed his own Cape cart at the disposal of Harold and Miss Delton to finish the remainder of their journey. He also furnished them with a strong escort. Thus, feeling perfectly safe, they continued on their way, and arrived at Itsobi just as the sun was beginning to set on the following night. Here they received a warm welcome from all the inhabitants, especially from Mr. and Mrs. Warren, to whose house Harold at once took Dorothy.

Almost everybody had begun to believe that they were dead. Strong search parties had been sent out by the military authorities, but not even a trace of

either the captive or Risk and Morton had they found, so they had returned to camp disconsolate and forced to believe that those for whom they searched were dead. Mr. and Mrs. Warren were amongst the few who still clung to the hope that they were yet alive, and great indeed was their joy when the cart containing Harold and Dorothy arrived. When the news of Ivor's death became known every one felt sad, for he was well known throughout the whole district, and had always been thought well of by all who knew him.

Meanwhile, the reaction had told on Dorothy, and the day after her arrival she was forced to remain in bed; the day following she was worse, and that night she was unconscious. For days after she lay at the point of death in a raging fever; but she was well nursed, and gradually she grew better.

When she came to herself Harold was sitting beside her holding her hand, and, as he saw the look of consciousness come into her face, his own brightened.

"Don't talk now," he said, as he saw her prepare to ask a question. "You have been ill; but, thank God, you are better now."

Then Mrs. Warren came in, and, seeing Dorothy so much recovered, she made Harold go out so that the patient might not become excited.

Every day now saw a change, and in the course of a few weeks Dorothy was able to go out on the stoep for a few hours each day. These hours were, she afterwards thought, the sweetest in her life; for Harold was then always with her, while Kakani, who with Mrs. Warren had been her constant attendant, would every now and again look out to see if her patient needed anything.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### CLOSING SCENES—FAREWELL TO ITSObI

THIS brings us near to the end of our story, and there is not much to add to that which has already been told. The war dragged on slowly to its close, and, although several big fights had taken place at Itsobi and elsewhere, it was generally agreed that the power of Kreli had been broken, and that it was now only a matter of time when the entire Gcaleka force would be brought to subjection. Numbers of prisoners were sent in from time to time, and Harold, who had been appointed to the command of the Itsobi garrison, so as to release Mr. Warren for his civil duties, learnt from one of these, who had been one of Moseti's captains at the time when Dorothy and Kakani had been liberated, that upon the night of their escape no less than sixty-five men had been killed and hurled down the ledge by Salmo.

Harold asked him how the natives knew that Salmo was dead ; for he remembered that, on the night when he was tied to the tree, the native who spoke in English had told him that three were dead. The man replied that Salmo's body had been found floating about in a river near the sea, and by this Harold knew that the subterranean stream into which Salmo had cast himself had an exit.

Harold had written a day or two after his arrival at Itsobi to Ivor Risk's people, telling them all



“There they had spent many happy hours, and there they had known sorrow and sadness. Behind them lay the past, and in the front of them lay the future, which now looked so bright, but which was all unknown.”

[To face p. 158.]



about Ivor; and in return he had received a letter from Risk's father, thanking him for the letter and inviting him, as soon as he was free to do so, to spend some time with them, as they were anxious to meet him and to hear from him personally everything which had occurred.

One night, soon after Dorothy had become convalescent, Harold was spending the evening at the Residency. Mrs. Warren, Dorothy, and he were sitting in the drawing-room. Dorothy had been singing, and when she finished she turned to find Harold standing beside her, and that Mrs. Warren had left the room during her song.

"Dorothy, Mrs. Warren has gone out because she knew that I wished to say something to you."

"Yes? And what do you want to say to me, Mr.—Harold?"

She corrected herself falteringly, and as she did so she blushed, looked confused, and then smiled.

"Oh, you know, Dorothy dear," answered Harold, and he too looked confused.

"No, I don't," Dorothy answered, with a smile and a lie simultaneously on her lips.

"Dorothy!"

"Harold!"

"That is all I wish to say, sweetheart!" said Harold, as with his arm around her waist he kissed her passionately.

---

The war was over, and Itsobi had completely lost its war-like appearance, save for a few sandbags piled up here and there on the outskirts of the village, where the schanzes had been. Something unusual, however, was occurring in the village, for the two traders' shops were closed and the magistrate's court had a deserted appearance; but at the magistrate's house something more than usual was going on, for carts, to the number

of about a dozen, stood before it, while the verandah was decked with an array of flags.

The truth was that inside the house the Rev. John Ford was at that moment busily engaged in tying together in the usual matrimonial manner Harold Morton and Dorothy Delton.

After the ceremony in the drawing-room—for there was no church in Itsobi—the guests, some thirty or more from all parts of the district, repaired to the dining-room, where the wedding breakfast was served. Then, when the time had arrived for the happy couple to depart, the entire party crowded into the carts and accompanied them, in the usual South African style, for some miles out of the village, where a general halt was called to crack a few more bottles and to say the final good-byes.

And these were indeed the final good-byes as far as Kafirland was concerned, for Harold had recently come into an inheritance from an old bachelor uncle whom he had scarcely known, and part of this inheritance consisted of a large residence in Sea Point, that most beautiful suburb of the city of Cape Town, and it was now their intention to reside there.

The farewells said, the carts departed one by one, while Dorothy and Harold stood on the hill at the back of their cart, looking for the last time at Itsobi as it lay in the valley. There they had spent many happy hours, and there they had known sorrow and sadness. Behind them lay the past, and in front of them lay the future, which now looked so bright, but which was all unknown.

"Come, darling, it grows late, and we have far to travel before we reach the place where we must stop for the night." Harold's voice at last broke the silence; and, helping his wife into the cart, they were once more on their way.

And here we must leave them as they go out of the old life into the new. In the old life they had lived alone; now they are together, to share each other's

joys when the sun shines bright and warm in the firmament of the heavens, and to sorrow together in those nights which must come to all, when even the stars give no light and when the thick dark clouds hang lowering over the earth.

THE END







UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 864 616 8

PR  
6021  
K466m

